

The more things change, the more they stay the same

I was flicking through the latest edition of “Inside Dairy” from DairyNZ & saw the following headline:

“Demo Farm Condition Scores Drive Fertility Outcomes”

The Southland Demonstration Farm have become fans of individual body condition score (BCS) & from 3 years ago when their 6-week In-calf rate was around 60% (vs. National Target of 78%) and empty rate was in double figures (around 14-15%), they now have a 6-week In-calf rate of 72% and their empty rate has fallen to below 10%.

They put this turnaround down to concentrating on individual BCS rather than looking at BCS as a herd average.

BCS of 5.0 is the target for all mixed age cows. They now have a trigger point of BCS 4 or less. Any cow in this category, regardless of stage of lactation is placed on once-a-day milking and preferentially fed.

This focus on cow condition has driven a steady improvement in the herd’s pre-mating cycling rate and an associated lift in conception rates.

At the same time the herd has experienced a 34% increase in per head production (due no doubt to more days in milk as well as improved individual cow production) as well as overall improvements in herd health.

None of this is a surprise. We all know (hopefully by now) that targeting individual BCS of 5 in all your mixed age cows (and 5.5 in your 1st & 2nd calvers) will inevitably lead to improvements in reproductive performance & milk production. It’s nice to see it recognised in print and especially relevant with mating



The Value of Early Intervention

How long are you going to mate for this season? Bearing in mind that we won’t have inductions to fall back on next year this becomes a very important decision.

If you start mating on the 20th October your calving start date is around 29th July. A Christmas day conception results in a 3rd October calving and pulling the bull out on New Year’s Day means your last calving will be on the 10th of October. That’s just over a 10-week mating period.

If you go to the end of January then you will still be calving after the start of AB and we’re getting back into the pre-induction days of the 60’s & 70’s. Do you really want that?

So let’s settle on an 10 -12 week mating period as a fair compromise. You’ll still have some cows calving late, but if you get all your ducks in a row the bulk of the herd should be in well before the end of September allowing sufficient lead-in time to mating. With the help of early intervention.

We’ve banged on about this for years but the biggest return on your investment (and that’s what it is) with cidrs, etc., is when you use them pre-mating, i.e. starting about 9-10 days before you begin AB.

Here’s the numbers based on a \$6 pay-out for a 400 cow herd with an expected rate of non-cyclers 10 days out from AB at around 20% (around 80 cows):

- 10 days prior to AB the costs of treatment will be around \$4,800 but the income from earlier conception & more days in milk, more AB calves, etc. will be around \$11,600; a nett return of about \$6,700. That’s \$1.39 return on every dollar spent.
- If you wait 21 days there will be fewer cows to treat so your costs drop to just under \$2,000 but your return on that investment is \$1,650 because of lost days in milk, less replacement calves & so on so it will actually cost you just over \$300

Breaking that down to a per-cow scenario:

- ◆ 10 days out the nett return is about \$84 per cow
- ◆ 7 days after the start of mating the return is about \$30 per cow
- ◆ And waiting until the end of the first round? It will cost you about \$8 per cow so you’re actually losing money if you treat any later than about a week after the start of AB

If you choose OvSynch on its own without the Cidr you will still get a return if you do it a week before or a week after the start of AB but the nett return is about \$30 less per cow.

These numbers are based on the usual assumptions of milk production, extra feed costs for more cows calving early, added value of an AB heifer calf & pay-out. There is enough evidence out there after many years of early intervention to back these figures up so if you’re serious about having a compact calving &

Re-Use of Cidrs

I know some of you like to 'save money' by re-using Cidrs on your non-cycling cows or perhaps transfer them from your heifers after synchrony to your cows.

Opinion on re-use of Cidrs in our practice amongst the vets is mixed. I'm not a fan, while others are more comfortable with the procedure.

Certainly re-use of a Cidr to treat a non-cycling cow is better than doing nothing but if you are a re-use fan be aware that release of progesterone from Cidrs is not linear i.e. it doesn't release into the cow evenly. On insertion of a new Cidr into a cow the initial release of powdered progesterone is quite rapid, known as 'dumping', and then you get gradual release after that.

So when you re-use a Cidr, while there's still progesterone there you can't assume that there is half the initial progesterone & you won't get the "dumping" effect, which is be important for influencing the pituitary gland.



So, while you are still free to re-use Cidrs (and for some of you it seems to work fine) please be aware that you do run the risk of inferior results because of the lower progesterone in the Cidr and the lack of a "dumping" effect to stimulate new follicles on the ovary.

With no inductions next season, this could become an important consideration.

BVD Testing of Bulls – this is a no brainer

BVD is a widespread viral infection of NZ cattle and has a wide ranging impact on cattle performance and hence productivity, including growth of young stock, pregnancy rates, susceptibility to disease and milk production. A proportion of cattle that get exposed to the virus become carriers for life. These are the animals that become infected whilst still a foetus. These 'persistently infected' animals are the major cause of spread of infection and should be detected and culled.



Persistently infected bulls are a great way to spread the virus as their semen contains large amounts of virus. They are also introduced to the herd at a time of greatest potential impact – at mating and first 3 months of pregnancy. The virus affects conception rates and causes increased early embryonic loss. The semen quality of these bulls may also be inferior. If this isn't enough, there are likely to be persistently infected calves born the following spring. These can be hard to rear and normally die before reaching 2 years of life.

To avoid such disasters, it is essential that all bulls brought in for mating are tested free of BVD virus. It is preferable that they are also BVD vaccinated prior to their use. When purchasing bulls that are advertised as BVD tested, ask to see a veterinary certificate of proof or the actual laboratory results. Make sure the result says 'BVD Ag negative' or 'BVD PCR negative.' If they haven't been BVD tested, purchase them conditional on a free test. Purchase them early enough to allow this to happen and give time for 2 vaccinations one month apart prior to their use – i.e. purchase at least 6 weeks prior to putting them into the herd.

Given the devastating economic impact a BVD persistently infected bull can have on a herd it is a no brainer to insist all bulls are BVD free at the time of purchase, even if you have to pay slightly more for such assurance.

*A wife asks her husband: "What do you like most in me, my pretty face or my sexy body?"
He looks at her from head to toe and replies: "I like your sense of humour!"*

Little Johnny watched, fascinated, as his mother smoothed cold cream on her face. "Why do you do that, mommy?" he asked.

*"To make myself beautiful," said his mother, who then began removing the cream with a tissue.
"What's the matter?" asked Little Johnny. "Giving up?"*