

May 2021

Preparation For Calving (Next Year)

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With calving almost finished, focus on suckler farms will very soon be on getting cows back in calf. I would say that preparation for calving next year has already started. Why do I say that? If your aim is for a tight calving pattern, you need your fertility to be good and cows to go in calf once the breeding season starts. The main things which help this are:

- Get the energy balance right.
- Get the mineral balance right.
- Be clean at calving to help minimise dirty calf beds.
- Check cows for endometritis /whites – cows need to be clean to go in calf.
- Bull fertility – test your bull if any suspicions of sub fertility.
- Vaccinations well in advance of breeding season
- If using ai consider synchronisation for the first day of breeding season.



David McKinstry—Parklands Vet

There are several advantages of a tight calving pattern associated with cows and calves being at a similar stage – feeding, vaccinating, disbudding etc done at the same time.

Careful selection of females to put to the bull will help with the following calving season. Some of the criteria I would consider for not breeding are:

- Cross at the calving
- Always hard to calf or had a caesarean this year.
- Bad udders or no suck
- Selection of heifers for easier calving – Pelvic measure and keep from cows that calf unaided.

Bull selection is the other major preparation for calving next year. Make sure to select an easy calving bull for heifers. Once you have your cows served the next thing is to get them scanned as soon as possible so you can get an accurate calving date. Doing this enables you to make a list of your cows in order of calving due date and then you can time vaccinations etc correctly. After that it's about trying to get your springers fit but not fat for calving. Dry cow minerals are really important for a number of reasons. They contribute to iodine and selenium levels (a particular problem on some farms in this part of the country) which are vital for healthy vibrant calves. They supply magnesium to the dry cow diet which helps set the cow up to have the correct calcium balance at the time of calving. This helps stop retained afterbirths and lazy calvers and so reduce the chances of endometritis.

Hygiene around calving is key to reducing disease in new born calves and cows. The calving pen supplies all the ingredients bugs need to grow so keep it as clean and dry as possible. Good preparation is so important when it comes to an easier calving season, some of this starts months back but even if you haven't managed to get all the initial parts in place it's not too late to do as much of it as you can and start thinking for next year. Attention to detail takes time but it is worth it in the long run.

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Young Calves and High Protein Lush Grass

Around Turnout for young calves the grass can be short and lush with a high protein content and very little fibre. This type of grass is what will make older cattle scour but in the young calves with a developing rumen it can be much more severe with fatalities developing. The problem seems to be the lack of fibre in the soft grass and exacerbated by the high protein content. The calves usually remain bright but start to scour after a week or so outside. The scour can persist until some calves lose weight and get dehydrated and die. The problem sometimes arises where we assume it is coccidiosis or worms causing the issue and treat for these. By the time we realise the treatment is not working the syndrome has got much worse. Treatment involves getting the calves more roughage in the diet. This can be achieved by offering straw in the field, however the calves may not eat enough of this to save themselves. Moving them onto coarser grasses should help a lot or sometimes bringing them back in to their original diet is the best answer. If you are seeing your calves scouring soon after turnout consult a Parklands vet.

Metritis (Dirty Calfbed) - Focus on Freshly Calved Cows

Cows calving at this time of year have been completely under your nutritional control throughout their dry period, and sometimes it's not so easy to get this important transition exactly right.

Metritis (infection of the calf bed) is a costly cause of infertility and loss of production. Severe metritis can result in a very sick animal with poor feed and water intakes, loss of condition, poor milk yield, and at its worst can cause peritonitis and death. However a more mild endometritis (whites) can be difficult to detect with cows giving less milk, losing condition and having poorer fertility. If not dealt with this can lead on to further production diseases such as ketosis and a twisted stomach.

Cows at a high risk of metritis:

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| • Twins | Abortion |
| • Milk Fever | Dead Calf |
| • Assisted Calving | Held Cleaning |

Metritis and Endometritis need to be detected and dealt with quickly to prevent loss of production and fertility so ask your vet to examine your freshly calved cows as part of your routine scanning visits. Remember, if a cow is affected with disease prior to reaching her maximum milk yield she is unlikely to obtain her best performance subsequently.

Pasteurella Pneumonia in Lambs

We have seen some outbreaks of Pasteurella pneumonia in young lambs. Please ensure the lambs are fully protected against this and speak to your Parklands vet for more advice on vaccine programs for lambs which can prevent lamb dysentery, pulpy kidney etc. Heptavac P or similar is a very effective vaccine. Timing is critical though, if the ewes were vaccinated correctly before lambing then the lambs should be safe until 5 or 6 weeks old in a bad year (older in good years). If the ewes were not vaccinated before lambing then the lambs will need vaccinated much younger. Consult a Parklands vets for more info.