

March 2025

Ensuring a Smooth Calving Season

With spring calving for both suckler and block calving dairy herds shortly upon us, it is worth thinking about the things that can be done now to ensure an easy calving season. Of course decisions that were made months ago about which heifers/cows to breed and which bulls to use will have a significant impact on how calving progresses. That said, there are still plenty of other variables that should be considered over the coming weeks. For most herds, it is probably too late to do much about any obese pregnant cows at increased risk of calving difficulties. Controlled loss of body condition in early to mid-pregnancy should be considered for cows over body condition score (BCS) 3.5 (scale 1-5), but no attempt should be made to reduce body condition in the last month of pregnancy. The good news is that in a study conducted across 84 spring calving suckler herds, fewer than 7% of cows fell into the over conditioned category (Bragg et al, Vet Record, 2021), indicating that the vast majority of suckler cows are not at risk of calving difficulties due to excess body condition. What did surprise in this study was the increased risk of calving difficulties for thin cows i.e. those under BCS 2.5. In fact, these animals were almost **twice as likely** to require calving assistance as those in ideal body condition. This may sound counter-intuitive, but highlights that thin cows are likely thin for a reason – they may be sick or they may be on a diet that is failing to meet their nutritional requirements. As such, there is still time for most spring calving herds to body condition score their cattle, and ensure that any thin cows are examined to determine whether they are suffering from an underlying disease problem (particularly lameness!) and provided with additional feeding. There are a host of other management and metabolic factors that may influence how things progress in the run up to calving. Group changes for example in late pregnancy are known to increase stillbirth rates, and so ensuring that any body condition scoring and group sorting is completed well before calving is due to start is important. The magnesium and calcium status of both suckler and dairy cows is also of paramount importance, with 25-30 grams of magnesium per head per day recommended for most rations in the last month of pregnancy to reduce the risk of slow calving syndrome, leading to weak and stillborn calves. Selenium and iodine deficiency are also important causes of weak and stillborn calves! Calves that are born with any assistance or that have a weak suck reflex 15 minutes after birth should always be supplemented with additional colostrum. 10% of bodyweight immediately after birth of high quality colostrum (over 22% when tested using a Brix refractometer) is considered to be the industry standard. Parklands now have a new addition to the colostrum range, SCCL, which guarantees it meets the standards and is full of antibodies! Whilst nutritional studies looking at the relationship of dietary protein and colostrum quantity and quality are inconsistent, ensuring that cows have sufficient Effective Rumen Degradable Protein in the ration should help to support colostrum production. With so many nutritional factors impacting on calving ease, calf viability and colostrum production, it is always worth ensuring that the cows are able to meet their current metabolic requirements from the ration on offer. Reviewing forage analysis and ration composition is a good start, with the option of taking blood samples from cows in the last three weeks of pregnancy to assess energy, protein and mineral balance. Speak to a Parklands vet for more info.



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Mineral Levels Around Calving

The calving season is under way, its vital to give every calf the best start to ensure a productive life. We have seen some examples of low vitamin E in herds causing a range of symptoms from weakly “sleepy” calves to increased incidence of scours and pneumonias. This problem usually starts in the dry period so its important to ensure the cows are getting enough minerals, one nutritionist suggested minerals should have Vit E at 4000iu/kg and Selenium at 20-30 mg/kg, Ensure Iodine levels are also adequate. The only way to be sure they have enough is to blood test some cows and calves for the important minerals.

- Vaccinate against Rotavirus and Coronavirus scours if applicable to your farm.
 - Ensure Fluke has been effectively treated since housing.
 - Check condition of the cows, especially older ones, separate and feed extra if necessary.
 - Ensure BVD Vaccination programme is up to date.
 - Ensure calving pens are cleaned and disinfected regularly.
 - Be prepared to feed colostrum to all calves. Colostrum concentrate is available for heifers short of milk or hold some good quality colostrum in the freezer from cows with a surplus.
- If scour occurs, sample calves immediately (before treatment) and send samples to the practice for initial testing.

Controlling Lungworm, Hoose or Husk

Hoose, Husk or Lungworm has increased over the years and appeared much earlier in the season than normal. There are some reasons for increased incidence of lungworm infection: Control strategies incorporating highly effective wormers can actually reduce the stimulus and therefore reduce the level of acquired immunity in young stock.

The majority of lungworm outbreaks occurring in adult cattle are due to exposure to lungworm following a reduction in immunity, commonly caused by lack of exposure due to too effective worming protocols, or prolonged housing! **Bovilis Huskvac** can provide effective immunity against the challenge of lungworm in at risk dairy cattle in the second year of grazing and in insufficiently exposed adult cows. Hoose is most commonly seen during the summer months. However, depending on weather conditions and stocking density, cases are reported all year round.

Clinical signs of lungworm infection: Cough - can be severe with typical straight out neck, head and tongue extended, and difficulty breathing, Weight loss, Marked reduction in milk yield, Reduced fertility, Extended calving interval, Early culling and it may cause death.

Control: The most effective control for Lungworm is to vaccinate with **Bovilis Huskvac** and worm cattle strategically for gut worm, along with good pasture management. **Bovilis Huskvac** stimulates pre-lung or larval immunity without the risk of clinical disease. Immunity is sufficient to prevent disease in the next grazing season, and further field challenge and booster vaccination provides prolonged immunity. Calves and adult cattle: Only healthy animals should be vaccinated, from eight weeks of age, with a **primary course of two oral doses**, four weeks apart and with turnout a minimum of two weeks later. Calves vaccinated in the first grazing season will need to be a minimum of 14 weeks of age at turnout. Wormers should not be given until two weeks after the second dose.

Booster doses: Lungworm immunity is maintained from season to season by exposure to the lungworm larvae, which will occur from grazing normal pastures after vaccination. If exposure has not occurred or cannot be confirmed, then a single booster dose will be required prior to turnout. Huskvac is only produced at this time of year so be sure to order in now, Huskvac cannot be got in the summer so don't leave it too late! Speak to a Parklands vet for more information.

