

Seasons greetings

And welcome our Christmas newsletter.

I think this is the first intro I've written since we started the practice where I've not been talking about extreme weather!

That said the effects of a roller coaster year are still being felt in this winters forage. From acidosis issues on fodder beat to palatability issues with whole crop we are certainly seeing some dietary issues at present.

We've also been busy with a number of industry initiatives of late with the new BVD Stamp it out meetings well underway and a number of Milksure training sessions for clients as more and more processors engage with this initiative.

The end of the year is a natural time for reflection on the year past and planning for the future. As such it tends to be the time we both undertake vet med and performance reviews with most clients. Despite a challenging year its great to see herd performance flying whilst savings are simultaneously being achieved. Check out the article inside on this subject.

Looking forward fertility is always the key focus for efficient produc-



tion. With the ongoing challenges of sourcing skilled labour more and more units are considering the value of synchronisation in fertility management. Inside Dan looks at the role of synchro programs and the benefits they can deliver.

With 2019 on the horizon (no pun intended!) we ourselves have also been busy planning for the future and we're excited to say the Horizon team will be expanding in the new year. Watch this space for an announcement very soon that we believe will enhance the practice.

That just leaves me to thank you all for your support and business over the last year, wish you a Merry Christmas and a successful 2019!



Milksure training -

Friday 18th January

1030-1400

Newport

Fertility Programs – in synch with your objectives?

As fertility performance is such a key driver of dairy herd profitability, it comes as no surprise that it is always an area of focus. Much like dairy farming in general, given the number of different approaches to fertility on farms there clearly isn't an outright winner otherwise everyone would be doing it the same way. There's a lot of conflicting information out there telling us what we should be doing, but how do we decide what to do?

possible to decide what KPIs we need to monitor, and how best to record the data to generate those KPIs quickly and efficiently. There are potentially hundreds of KPIs you could look at, so it's important to focus on a few key drivers and understand how they might be influenced. Some people like different KPIs to others, and that is not a problem if the different implications and limitations are considered.

Routines – more than just fist- ing

A massive part of successful routine fertility visits is ensuring what we currently do is still the best way forward. It sounds obvious but we should be aware that situations on farm change and we may need to adapt our protocols to respond to this – an ongoing, regular review of KPIs and resources is key to identifying bottlenecks



Objectives

In order to drive progress it's important to have set objectives to achieve – something most people would agree with. However, there's another part of this equation that most people don't mention – these objectives should be *your* objectives, and not just those decided by others. External advisors can certainly help in this process, but unless you agree with them and are fully on board, then it is very unlikely that you'll achieve those objectives in the long term.

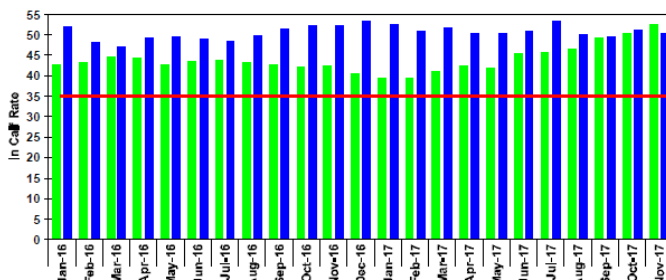
Therefore, an important process of fertility management is the discussion surrounding what it is that drives you. After that it is

Fertility Protocols

There are a massive range of fertility protocols out there, and again given there is no clear winner they all have their pros and cons. However, it is important that there is a fertility protocol drawn up for your farm and that it is agreed and actioned upon. This protocol should complement the strengths and weaknesses of the system and be appropriate to your objectives. There are some very effective tools in the armoury such as fixed time AI protocols, but considering how and when to utilise them to best effect is a wise move.

early and implementing the necessary changes. With weekly/fortnightly routines it can be very easy to carry on as normal, so something we regularly do with our clients is schedule a separate catch up to look at the data and refine the plan as necessary.

The summary of this article is broadly applicable to all areas of dairy farming, not just fertility. Take the time to determine and discuss *your* objec-



Veterinary costs vs animal health investments – getting good value from your vet med expenditure

Watching the pennies and ensuring best value for money are always important to any business, dairy farms particularly. But finding the balance between cost and return can be tricky particularly where animal health is concerned. One of our founding principles when we set up Horizon Dairy Vets was to deliver best value to farms. So, one year on how are we getting?

Finding savings –

A farmer once recited the snappy phrase on reducing costs, “Buy a 10% cheaper product, use 10% less and then negotiate a 10% discount!” Whilst everyone likes a discount, the other two points are just as relevant to reducing costs. The periodic vet med reviews provided a valuable opportunity to review current medicine use and look for improvements. Just because a protocol has worked well in the past doesn't mean it can't be improved on. When considering those changes, it is also important to keep an eye on withdrawal periods as any increase in milk withhold can rapidly negate medicine savings.



Investing in performance

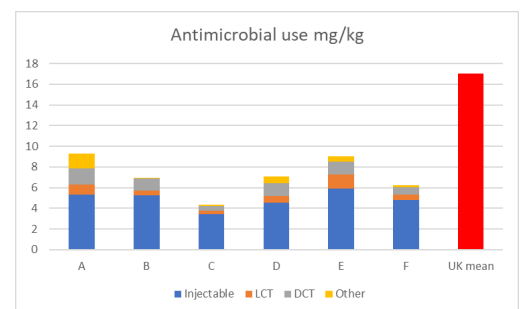
It's too easy to become one dimensional when considering vet med costs. Contrary to popular belief less isn't always more, particularly if cutting costs hits performance. As much as it is important to identify waste, it is also critical to consider performance and identify areas for investment. Common priorities this year have included fertility and calf health. We've seen some great returns on some of these investments, non less than the unit where calf pneumonia vaccination has saved more than twice its price in treatment costs alone.

Each year new challenges emerge than sitting down to review performance and investment forms a core part of the cycle of continuous improvements we all strive for.

Antimicrobial use –

This is always big area of attention during our client reviews. At the end of the day none of us set out to use antibiotics, they are the product of things going wrong. Whilst their use may be necessary, the need for them in the first place simply represents a cost to the business. Beyond this these medicines come under heavy scrutiny these days, with many processors and retailers looking for farms

to reduce their use. So, it is pleasing to report that currently our clients average use is under 8mg/kg, less than half the national average. It's also great to see the number of clients investing heavily in vaccinations to prevent problems. This places most in a strong sustainable position, with the UK dairy sectors strategy on antimicrobials aiming to reduce usage to just under 14mg/kg.



Medicine costs –

As ever we work hard to ensure farms get good value on what they purchase. Whilst only a small business we have strived to find efficiencies to deliver cost savings on farm. It can be challenging to draw simple year to year comparisons as new challenges emerge and spend patterns vary. Detailed analysis of client's medicine purchases shows an average saving of just over 8%.

What else have we been up to this month

Autumn 2018 was certainly a busy one for our dairy veterinary consultancy service Dairy Insight. As most of you know, when the clinical work is relatively quiet, we fill the remainder of our time with varying amounts of project work for farmers and agribusinesses. So what have we been busy with recently?

Dave's AHDB Dairy fertility workshops saw him travel the length and breadth of the UK talking to a These workshops combined with ongoing work on some of the AHDB Reference Farms has meant that Dave has spent a fairly amount of time in the limelight. If you didn't

manage to get along to any of the talks and workshops, don't panic as there are more in the pipeline!



Dan managed to rack up a considerable amount of airmiles with a whole range of projects in the last three months – from a not-so-relaxing long weekend on a desert

dairy in Sudan, through to on-farm consultancy across the Ukraine, farmer workshops in Ireland and delivering training in Italy. A varied caseload covering all aspects of dairy herd management certainly means we have to keep at the top of our game and provides plenty of experiences to challenge us. Wherever you are in the world, the cows are broadly similar and have similar needs – it's the people and the cultures you need to figure out!

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Medicines update -

I new it was too good to be true when we wrote last time of fresh start with all meds back available and optimistic outlook of uninterrupted supplies. That lasted all of a month until once again one of the major pharmaceutical companies, Zoetis, once more let us down by suddenly ceasing supply of Orbeseal. It's been a tricky few weeks with a lot of cows going dry but I think so far we've just about kept everyone supplied. Supplies are now easing but it will take a little time for the market to be fully resupplied so please bare with us.

On a more positive note there is some good news for those of you using rotavirus vaccine. An alternative one shot vaccine has now been launched called Bovigen. Initial feedback seems good and it represents a significant cost saving over Rotavec corona. As ever we'll be discussing this where relevant during review meetings but if you want more information just speak to one of us.

