



DN NEWSLETTER

issue 17

There is no cheap way to rear good heifers! Rearing heifers is the second highest cost to a dairy business, however, if farmers try to cut corners when rearing heifers the consequences are paid in the first lactation and lifetime performance. If heifers are neglected, there are less replacement heifers to select from because they have not met the performance targets.

Heifer Rearing Profit Centre

Sometimes bad things happen to good cows – when this does happen, the objective is to ensure good quality heifers are available to replace the cows that have to leave. Everyone will have their own take on the cost of rearing heifers, but one thing is for sure it will be the second highest individual cost on the dairy. Estimates generally lay somewhere around the £1,650 per head mark with a significant proportion of this being attributed to feed costs. One of the quickest ways we can reduce rearing costs is by feeding Zinpro's Availa®Plus trace mineral program to your heifers. This has been shown to improve feed efficiency and reduce feed costs in growing heifers by a massive 11% with the additional benefit of a positive effect on preventing digital dermatitis – this could be worth up to £100 per heifer in saved feed costs!

Growth in the early stages, especially up to weaning, has a significant effect on milk production in the first lactation. Every 100g of additional daily growth results in 225kg of milk in the first lactation. Conversely, every 50kg in weight below target calving weight is equivalent to a loss of 2kg of milk per day. Ensuring heifers meet growth targets is paramount to ensure we can tap into their genetic potential.

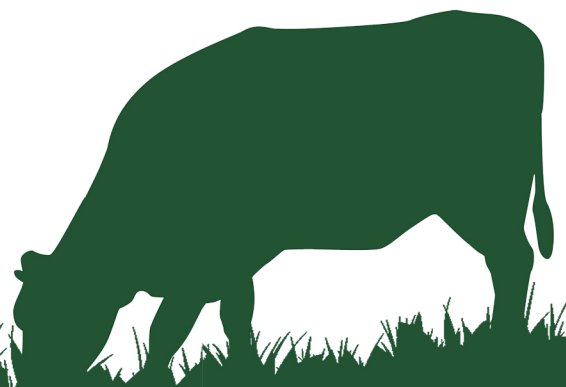
Replacement Rate

Controlling replacement rate comes down to cow comfort, lameness and transition - get these right and replacement rate will drop. Naturally, the higher the replacement rate the more heifers that are required to fill the slots. In most cases this results in replacement quality dropping because we need more heifers and cannot be as picky about which ones join the herd. More heifers lead to overstocking of youngstock facilities to accommodate them all and it then becomes

a vicious cycle. Instead of bringing in only the best replacements to push the performance of the herd forward we end up 'standing still' even if they are genetically superior. The replacement rate can be both too high and too low. The optimal would be in the region of 21-30%.

First Lactation Performance

The performance of first lactation animals can be assessed on the basis of their level of production compared to mature cows. A good metric is a comparison on a mature equivalent basis. This converts the yield of a first lactation animal into a mature equivalent. The mature equivalent of first lactation animals should always be superior to the yield of the mature cows in the herd – if not then that heifer should not be there!



Targets

The reality is that too many heifers reared on dairies fail to reach a standard that does not compromise herd performance and most of the reasons for this are related to management during the rearing phase. Heifer rearing is a process with defined targets and therefore it is relatively simple to introduce quality control points from birth to calving. Unfortunately, the most popular quality control metric is first lactation performance, by which time the heifer has already had an impact on herd profitability and possibly occupied a slot without giving an economical return.

Introducing quality control points throughout the rearing period will ensure only the best heifers occupy a space, thus optimising profit. Examples of quality control points would be: colostrum received, Serum IgG, weight at weaning, incidence of respiratory disease, and weights at key periods such as insemination.

The quality of the heifers that replace cows in milking herd will dictate overall herd performance so focusing on continually producing heifers that outperform the older generation should be the primary objective. Introduce quality control points to identify where improvements can be made. Well reared heifers will have a longer productive life in the herd provided they have a comfortable environment and are transitioned well during their life.



Optimising Profit Space per Cow

Due to increased demand, we are re-running the first in our series Zoom meetings in conjunction with Zinpro on Monday 2nd November 2020. This meeting will focus on optimising profit per cow space.

One of the biggest bottlenecks limiting your maximum revenue is the size of your facilities. Join us via Zoom where Research Nutritionist, Dr. Huw McConochie from Zinpro will discuss and share tips on the factors that can help optimise your profit per stall without the need to build more sheds!



We will be running our online meetings every 2 weeks via Zoom.

Visit the **UPCOMING EVENTS** page on the DN website to see our full online meeting schedule for 2020-21.

DN Calf Feeding Guide

The DN Calf Feeding Guide focuses on nutrition and management from birth to calving down.

The Calf Feeding Guide is available on the **TECHNICAL** area of the DN website.

