

Check The Condition Of Spring Calvers Now

Since the end of the drought grass has been growing almost continuously. In a normal autumn grass growth and quality is declining so spring calvers generally tend to start losing condition, at an increasing rate, from September onwards until they are weaned. This autumn cows were faced with an increasing amount of extremely high D grass, gaining condition rapidly. Although growth slowed in late October it never really stopped so stock have had a continual, restricted supply of grass grown yesterday with energy values of around 12 ME/kg DM. Hence if cows were able to graze only 5 – 6 kg DM/day their requirements would be fully met. In fact if they were dry and in early pregnancy they would be gaining condition!

As a consequence it is possible there could be more overfat cows and hence calving difficulties this spring. If you check and find cows are fatter than normal then points to consider are –

- Don't increase levels of concentrate feeding to the cows as this is likely to increase calf birthweights.
- Give fat cows as much exercise as possible eg is it possible to let them out into a dry bare field during the day and put them in again at night? (The only problem with this is that it might well increase the number of cows calving at night!)
- Make sure all cows are given extra magnesium beginning 2 weeks before calving is due to start. The best way of doing this is to feed 30 g/cow/day of a high mag mineral in addition to the mineral currently being fed.
- If you have more calving difficulties than normal with calves slow to stand and suckle discuss with your vet possible training, so you can inject bicarbonate intravenously into calves slow to stand.
- If you have extreme difficulties and a caesarean then discuss with your vet the possibility of inducing the remaining cows.

This spring could well be one which clearly identifies difficult calving bulls!

Basil Lowman, SAC Consulting Beef Specialist
basil.lowman@sac.co.uk

How Fat Are Your Ewes?

It appears that some ewes are in tremendous condition, with a significant proportion being overfat. Although it is too late to rapidly change ewe condition, some tips would be –

- Take time to check the condition score of your ewes now. Ideally try to handle one or two. If you think they are too fat consider delaying housing and starting feeding.
- If feeding twice a day put troughs at either side of the field, making the sheep walk, keeping them fit.
- Keep an extra vigilant eye out for couped ewes
- If the flock is scanned treat the 3 groups separately eg –
 - Singles – tighten up stocking rates to reduce grass intakes and make them work harder ie get exercise.
 - Twins – maintain current stocking rates or gradually decrease them as grass growth increases.
 - Triplets – maintain stocking rates and consider feeding 100 g per ewe per day of mineralised protected soya.

Kirsten Williams, SAC Consulting Beef & Sheep Consultant
kirsten.williams@sac.co.uk

This article is from SAC's monthly publication Sheep & Beef News. If you would like more information or to subscribe please contact Val Angus on 01835 823322 or val.angus@sac.co.uk