

## **Fat Cows This Autumn**

It appears that in many parts of the country cows are carrying more condition than they have for many years. For autumn and spring calving herds this means action must start now.

### **Autumn Calvers**

- Delaying weaning is not really possible as it is essential for the cow to be dry for at least 4 weeks to build up sufficient colostrum for her next calf. In addition delaying weaning would seriously impact the performance of the current calf as it would be essential for cows to be kept on tight grazing.
- Graze cows on dry pastures or stubbles, if necessary make straw available in ring feeders but make sure protein requirements are met. If possible use a liquid urea product poured over the top of the bale to avoid feeding extra energy. The same approach can be taken for supplying minerals and vitamins, remembering to feed additional magnesium to help improve muscle tone.
- Try and force cows to take as much exercise as possible i.e. by placing ring feeders as far as possible from the water trough etc.
- If cows are grazing away from buildings, handling facilities, etc. consider housing them so they are easier to check and assist when required. Where expected calving dates are known this can be done on a batch basis allowing cows at least 3 weeks to settle before they calve.
- Once mothered up cows and calves can be turned out – weather permitting!
- If the early calvings are difficult or include caesarean discuss with your vet the possibility of inducing calving, see the following article.
- Fat cows are more likely to suffer from metabolic disorders so pay close attention to rations post calving.

### **Spring Calvers**

- Assess the condition of the herd now and if they are in much greater condition than normal i.e. condition score 3 ½ or better start planning now. Although the start of calving is nearly 6 months away for herds starting in March it would still take a loss of nearly 0.5 kg per day starting now for cows to lose one unit of condition!
- Where buildings allow, the best approach would be to house cows and calves together and to wean calves 2 – 3 months later than normal. This is the easiest way to make cows lose condition by forcing them to milk off their back. It will also reduce the weaning check and the risk of

pneumonia post housing as well as either reducing the amount of concentrates needing to be fed for the calves or increasing their growth rates if fed the normal level of concentrates.

- If weaning cannot be delayed e.g. calves are sold in the autumn try and outwinter cows, particularly the fattest ones. Poor hill grazings are ideal but if it has to be a sacrifice field e.g. stubbles, ensure cows are not overfed. One simple way of doing this is to feed silage and straw on alternate days.
- If cows have to be housed ensure they are appropriately grouped e.g. put all late calving cows in one group and divide the rest into 3 groups, very fat, fat, and ok. Rations can then be adjusted accordingly to ensure they mobilise the correct amount of condition by one month pre calving.
- Pay special attention to in-calf heifers. Although they are likely to be much fatter than normal will still continue to grow over the winter.

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