

## A Basic Review of Improving Performance in Suckler Herds:

With decoupling of subsidies, every farming enterprise has to contribute to the profitability of the business. There are currently a number of organisations publishing figures to show every suckler cow loses money but with care and attention to detail cows can produce a return.

Fertility is one key to profitability. The aim is to produce a calf for sale or retention from every cow bulled. This is a very difficult task but there are herds producing 90 calves per 100 cows bulled in a 6 week period and 96 calves in a 9 week period. To achieve this:-

The cows must be healthy and free from disease.

Planning and a health programme should avoid;

- A) Endometritis following on from retained cleansings, milk fever, difficult or late calvings and caesareans.
- B) Bovine viral diarrhoea virus.
- C) Leptospirosis.
- D) Infectious bovine rhinotracheitis.
- E) *Campylobacter*.
- F) Liver fluke.
- G) Lameness.
- H) Mastitis.

2) The cows' nutrition must be correct for spring calving cows, they should calve down at Condition Score (CS) 2.0 and go to the bull at CS 2.5 and rising. Trace element levels must be correct. This includes Copper, cobalt, zinc, selenium and often iodine.

3) The bulls must be in a condition to work.

- A) Free of disease (B to G above).
- B) Fit but not fat.
- C) Have working reproductive organs.

4) The choice of breeding stock must be correct for the farm.

A) Easy calving short gestation length cows and bulls are available of various breeds; remember there is a huge variation within each breed, probably as much as between breeds.

B) Enough skilled labour must be available for your choice of system. Extensive easy care systems suit some farms more intensive higher output will suit others.

Having produced calves they must be kept healthy and growing strongly. Again planning and a health programme are vital.

1) Preventing disease is very important as production soon suffers and costs rise rapidly. Important diseases to prevent are.

A) Scour due to a range of pathogens most notably rotavirus, coronavirus, *E. Coli*, *Cryptosporidium* and coccidiosis.

B) Pneumonia again due to a range of pathogens the most important of which are respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), parainfluenza virus 3 (PI3), infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), *Pasteurella* species, *Histophil* *somni* and *Mycoplasma* species.

2) Providing correct nutrition is also vital. The cow supplies milk but that can be very varied in quantity and quality depending on genetics, breed, nutrition and age. Decisions about creep feeding will depend on target growth rates and sale dates.

Your veterinary surgeon will be able to help with Health Planning including how to avoid problems as well as a vaccination programme to control the diseases you already have. Routine pregnancy diagnosis and bull testing by your vet are vitally important as not only do you get reliable results but it allows your vet to look.