

Caring for your cows and heifers



A cow's body condition, plus mothering ability, influence the viability of its calves. Reject any cows that do not demonstrate adequate mothering ability as breeding stock.



Thin cows lack stamina to calve unaided and produce poor quality colostrum.

Ideal body condition score is between 2 and 3, ie 'fit not fat'.

Fat cows run an increased risk of calving difficulties.



Health

Many diseases can compromise fertility, often without obvious signs. Work with your vet to investigate and monitor your herd's health status particularly for:

- BVD
- Leptospirosis
- Johne's disease
- IBR
- Neospora
- Campylobacter



Calving period

A compact calving period, ideally less than 12 weeks, saves money.

- Labour can be optimised
- Procedures (eg dehorning, vaccination) conducted at the same time.
- Cows and calves at a similar stage in the production cycle, so fed more efficiently.



Vitamins and minerals

Under supply or over supplementation, can cause problems with fertility and calf viability, especially with

- copper
- iodine
- selenium
- Vitamin E

Start any supplementary feeding well ahead of the relevant period.

Remember: poor performance is more commonly caused by inadequate energy and/or protein nutrition.

Managing body condition

In spring calving herds: allow cows to gain weight before housing (**REMEMBER:** grazed forage is cheaper than concentrates or conserved forage). Then allow weight loss during winter to achieve target condition at calving. Manipulating previous weaning can help achieve this.

If cows do not put on sufficient condition during summer, use supplementary feeding early – not late – in winter.

In autumn calving herds: body condition relies on good grazing management.

Post-calving, place cows on a rising plane of nutrition to ensure a good milk supply for the calf and an early return to service.

Maintain rising plane of nutrition during the serving period to maximise fertility.

Suckler cows should:

- conceive readily when put to the bull
- be sound enough to carry a calf to term
- calve easily

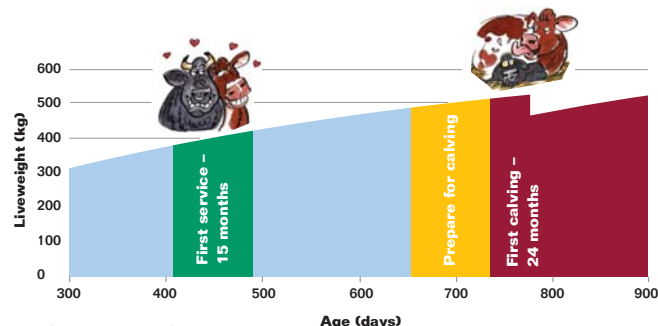


Pre-calving checklist

- ✓ Adequate cow condition and nutrition
- ✓ Adequate, clean calving boxes
- ✓ Clean, serviced calving aids
- ✓ Ropes and lubricant
- ✓ Supplies of frozen, or powdered, colostrum for emergencies
- ✓ Navel dressing to treat newborn calves

Before serving

- Inspect cows carefully and remove any which are unsuitable for serving again
- Investigate cause of poor condition in individual animals and remedy
- Ensure a rising plane of nutrition
- Complete all necessary vaccinations



Replacement policy

Replacement heifers should weigh at least 65% of mature bodyweight at first service, ie: if cows weigh 650kg, heifers should weigh at least 420kg when served. For bought-in replacements develop a biosecurity plan with your vet and implement it. The plan will depend on the herd's health status and replacement source. It is likely to include testing, treatments and vaccinations during the quarantine period.

Calving interval

The calving interval, or number of days between calves, is a good overall indication of fertility. More than three quarters of the herd should be producing another calf within 365 days of calving. If the calving interval is longer, consult your vet.

Calving ease

Easy calving this year sets the cow up for early conception, tight calving pattern, next year. So choose a bull with good Calving Ease Direct EBVs.

Work with your vet to monitor cow health and fertility

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