Lactation is the period in a dairy cow’s life where she repays you for all the care and cost you have invested in her. It’s the time for payback and so it’s important that it is successful. Have you ever wondered why there is such a big variation in how well a group of dry cows or heifers go on to perform in lactation?

There are lots of herds where cows which share a lot of the same genetics and live in the same buildings and are fed the same rations but vary massively in production. Why does that happen? Why don’t we get consistent, good performance? The most common reason for this range in performance is failure to properly prepare our cows and heifers.

The most hazardous period of life for a dairy cow is calving which signals the start of lactation. The peri-parturient cow faces a whole series of potential threats to her health from dystocia, metabolic disease, mastitis, lameness and social stresses. If we can eliminate these and she stays healthy she will produce milk, it’s what she’s been designed to do. Understanding what the dairy cow requires to set up a successful lactation, and consistently delivering that in a practical way on commercial dairy farms is a huge challenge for the industry.

Perhaps the best place to start is at drying-off, which typically happens 55-60 days before calving. Is drying off the start of a holiday period in an out-of-sight out-of-mind sort of system or does drying-off trigger a chain of events designed to maximize the potential of the next lactation? We must start to prepare for lactation during the dry period, or even in late lactation, and consistently delivering that in a practical way on commercial dairy farms is a huge challenge for the industry.

The list of options available to measure and monitor is nearly endless. We can score for mobility, body condition, cleanliness, cubicle comfort, leg lesions, rumen fill, dystocia, faeces and more. We can measure trough space, lying area, dry matter intake, milk yield, butterfat, protein, somatic cell count, urea, BHB, NEFAs and more. We can record rates of mastitis, metritis, ketosis, milk fever, RFM, lameness, mortality, twinning and more not to mention all the fertility parameters. The impact of metabolic disease on fertility is well documented with negative effects on the uterine environment, ovarian function, expression of oestrus and conception rates, optimising dry cow preparation will avoid these risks.

All of the above parameters have their place and are of value but the things we record only become really useful if we are going to compare them to a target and allow the result to generate a response. If we fail to meet the agreed target and then fail to take action we might as well have not bothered. How much of this information is already recorded as part of farm assurance or to meet the requirements of a milk processor or supermarket? Let’s make use of it!
**Lungworm and fluke forecasts**

Information coming from various disease surveillance centres indicates that this summer has been a good season for lungworm and that the risk remains high. This concurs with what the vets are seeing clinically on farm with plenty of cattle showing symptoms of lungworm. Remember that it’s not just cattle in their first grazing season that are at risk, we are seeing lungworm in adult cattle too.

There are lots of products available for treating infected stock so speak to your regular vet or Mark Pass at Beeston Animal Health to find out what is most appropriate for your cattle. The forecasts also indicate another strong challenge from liver fluke this year. Again it’s well worth speaking to your regular vet or Mark about fluke control strategies. There are lots of factors to consider when deciding how and when to treat for fluke so make sure you get the right advice for your sheep and cattle.

Monthly disease updates from NADIS can be found on our website www.willowsfarmvets.co.uk

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**WELCOME**

We welcome our new veterinary Surgeon Hayley Horsell to the practice. Hayley graduated earlier this year from Liverpool University and has previously lived on a dairy farm whilst studying in New Zealand. Hayley is interested in all aspects of farm work and is looking forward to meeting all our clients.

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**Cheshire Ploughing Match**

We had a lovely day at the Cheshire Ploughing Match last week at Hatley Farm in Frodsham. The glorious weather meant that it was a very busy event and it was great to see so many clients join us on our stand. We hoped you all enjoyed the day.

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**Alsager Office**
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**Mold Office**
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