Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas

FESTIVE OPENING TIMES

HARTFORD
Friday 23: 8am - 6pm
Saturday 24: 8am - 1pm
Sunday 25: CLOSED
Monday 26: 9am - 12 noon
Tuesday 27: 9am - 12 noon
Wednesday 28: 8am - 6pm
Thursday 29: 8am - 6pm
Friday 30: 8am - 6pm
Saturday 31: 8am - 1pm
Sunday 1: CLOSED
Monday 2: 9am - 12 noon

CHARTER
Saturday 24:
Congleton 9am - 11am & 2pm - 4pm
Biddulph 12 noon - 1pm
Sunday 25: CLOSED
Monday 26: CLOSED
Tuesday 27: CLOSED
Wednesday 28: 8am - 6pm
Thursday 29: 8am - 6pm
Friday 30: 8am - 6pm
Saturday 31: CLOSED
Sunday 1:
Congleton 9am - 11am & 2pm - 4pm
Biddulph 12 noon - 1pm
Sunday 1: CLOSED
Monday 2: CLOSED

ALSAGER
Saturday 24: 9.30am - 11.30am
Sunday 25: CLOSED
Monday 26: CLOSED
Tuesday 27: CLOSED
Wednesday 28: 8.30am - 6.30pm
Thursday 29: 8.30am - 6.30pm
Friday 30: 8.30am - 6.30pm
Saturday 31: 9.30am - 11.30pm
Sunday 1: CLOSED
Monday 2: CLOSED

MANOR COURT
Friday 23: 9am - 2pm
Saturday 24: 11am - 12 noon
Sunday 25: CLOSED
Monday 26: CLOSED
Tuesday 27: CLOSED
Wednesday 28: 9am - 5.30pm
Thursday 29: 9am - 5.30pm
Friday 30: 9am - 5.30pm
Saturday 31: 11am - 12 noon
Sunday 1: CLOSED
Monday 2: CLOSED

MOLD
Friday 23: 8am - 5pm
Saturday 24: CLOSED
Sunday 25: CLOSED
Monday 26: CLOSED
Tuesday 27: CLOSED
Wednesday 28: 8am - 5pm
Thursday 29: 8am - 5pm
Friday 30: 8am - 5pm
Saturday 31: CLOSED
Sunday 1: CLOSED
Monday 2: CLOSED

The importance of getting heifers to calve at 24 months should not be underestimated. Research shows that it costs £2.85/day for every day a heifer calves after 24 months, due to extra feed and building requirements. In addition, the higher the age of first calving the more heifers are required on farm to maintain replacement rate, see table below.

This table (from AHDB) shows the total number of heifers required on a farm at different ages of first calving and culling rates. It shows that, for a herd of 200 cows, having an AFC of 28 months and culling rate of 29% (national average) needs an extra 60 heifers (142 v 84) on farm to achieve replacements compared to a herd with an AFC of 24 months and a culling rate of 20%, this results in:

- Extra feed costs - 2x number of mouths
- Extra building costs - 2x amount of space required

The benefits of achieving an age of first calving of 24 months are as follows:

- Increased milk yield and increased milk yield per day of life
- Improved fertility
- Increased longevity - longer productive life
- Faster genetic improvement in herd
- Reduced calving difficulties and calf mortality
- Better group management
- Release land/buildings for other purposes i.e. more cows!

The poor milk price over the past months, dairy farmers and their advisers have been quite rightly reviewing their costs in an effort to remain profitable. This is perhaps one of the reasons why there has been so much coverage in the dairy press recently about how profitable it is to get your replacement heifers calving down at 24 months. UK figures suggest that heifer rearing is costing somewhere between 2-3 ppl making it the second largest variable cost for many dairy farmers.

We have surveyed over 100 Willows dairy herds which have had at least 10 homebred heifers calve down in the last year to assess local performance. Almost 5,500 dairy heifers born and reared on your farms are included in this study. The results are displayed in the chart below where we see that only 25 of 109 herds are achieving an average age at first calving of 23-25 months. In 40 of 109 herd the average age at first calving is over 27 months.

The benefits of achieving an age of first calving of 24 months are as follows:
One of the key things to consider when trying to get heifers to calve down at 24 months is growth rate. Size does matter and a common reason farms struggle to achieve the 24 month target is that heifers are not big enough at this age or more accurately they are not big enough at 14 months when they should be getting bred. Heifer rearing practice needs to be reviewed and adjusted as necessary to achieve the growth rates that are required. Investment in this area has the potential to yield massive returns as demonstrated in the costings above.

In summary, the vast majority of herds have a great opportunity to save money by rearing their replacement heifers better and achieving the target average age at first calving of 24 months. We have a range of tools we can use to help you monitor heifer performance including mobile weighing facilities. In addition, we also have an enthusiastic team of vets who can help you improve your heifer rearing regardless of where you are starting from.

Genomics in the US

Over the last few years there has been steady investment, across the larger commercial dairies, in their replacement heifer genetics. As mentioned in the previous article, this increased reliability in predicting performance, based on the individuals’ genetic markers, at such an early stage of life, provides an ability to gain rapid improvement in farm-specific herd performance.

An individual farm is able to place their own perceived importance on certain traits to select for animals with the characteristics they believe will make their farm more profitable.

In any population, there is a spread of animals as shown in the graph below, which can apply to any trait, such as yield, daughter pregnancy rate, days open etc, i.e. some perform very well, some very poorly and a lot are ‘middle of the road’.

Using this distribution of animals derived from our genomic testing, we can identify the higher performing animals, and use these to provide your source of replacements. For example, in the US the top 25% of animals produced 1613 kg more milk than those in the bottom 25%, and likewise, the top 25% for daughter pregnancy rate averaged 37 fewer days open than the bottom 25% of the herd. After studying some of the figures on one farm, the improvement in daughter pregnancy rate (DPR) after one year alone had been dramatic, shifting the entire graph to the right indicating a greater proportion of animals were of high genetic merit for DPR.

On the American dairies this tool was proving popular to reduce waste. With a high proportion of Jersey farms, there is great effort to utilise sexed semen with both the cows, at appropriate times, and with the top genomic performing heifers, to provide appropriate numbers of replacements based on their cull rate. Conventional Jersey semen was avoided to ensure minimal Jersey bull calves on the farm, and instead beef semen was used, to ensure any non-replacement animals were still profitable. They can see the short term business efficiency benefits from increasing calf value, and the longer term investment reward from quick reliable genetic gain from a more productive herd.

We are able to provide a cost-benefit calculation for your individual farm, based on the herds’ current genetic base, and performance targets. The Clarifide system uses UK data and provides reports designed to collate the available data and aid breed selection, unlike other genomic testing packages. If you have any questions regarding genomic testing, please get in touch with Darrell or Owen, who have been further trained in this area.

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