How do you record yours?

When it comes to recording the day to day events that happen to the livestock on farm there are a huge range of methods and systems available. Just cast your mind back over the past week and try to recall all the calvings, inseminations, dry-offs, weighings, vaccinations, mastitis treatments, feet trimmed, BCS noticed, pneumonia treatments, lots of other treatments! Now consider how many of these events you recorded, in how many places/ formats are they recorded and can they be accessed easily? Ultimately recording data should be the first step in a process which leads to decision making via robust analysis. It was therefore an absolute pleasure to welcome so many of our dairy clients to the inaugural Willows Dairy Conference where the theme was data and decision making.

Nial O’Boyle was the keynote speaker and shared some of his experiences managing large dairies in USA. Nial emphasised the need to record data that is relevant to the dairying system you are using and to use data to measure changes in your performance primarily but also to benchmark your herd against other similar herds. The number one daily measure used by Nial on his herds was Dry Matter Intake, the herds had a series of measures they looked at weekly and others which they monitored monthly. Nial was also keen to point out the need for realistic targets, agreed intervention points and agreed action plans to be implemented as required. Regardless of the system, fertility is a key driver of efficient production which is best measured in terms of pregnancies created per week, 3 week return rates also gave a good head-up of what to expect at PD. Fresh cow disease rates and calf disease rates were monitored weekly as were forage dry matters and milk volume and constituents. Other parameters such as culling, preg rate, culls <60 DIM and other repro figures were monitored monthly. The message was not to just duplicate this but to identify which parameters matter most in your business and focus on those.

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TB update

Spring always brings a surge of extra TB testing across the practice which adds to the already massive workload of testing. The office staff do a fantastic job of accommodating all these tests as far as possible to suit everyone. In order to help in the process continue to run smoothly it would be helpful if you could,

• Reply promptly to messages from the office staff regarding your TB test
• Stick to the arranged date organised for your test
• Ensure you have adequate help on test days for cattle handling
• Ensure you have suitable handling facilities to allow testing to be completed safely and efficiently
• Make sure all cattle have tags that can be read

We realise and appreciate that many of you do all the above to a high standard. We do however have a number of herd tests where the help and facilities are less than ideal. We are not obliged to test animals if there is not sufficient help or suitable handling facilities. Your vet will be able to advise you on how your testing procedures can be improved to ensure a safe and efficient TB test.

Speed Karting at Warrington

A select band of intrepid racers gathered in Warrington for the annual Willows karting event. Many thanks to Merial Animal Health for sponsoring the pizza! As the evening progressed it became clear that we did have some genuinely talented racers in our midst and that the rest of us had spent too much time driving scraper tractors.

In the final showdown it was Jason Smith from Brookhouse Farm, Bostock who took the chequered flag, many congratulations to Jason and many thanks to all who took part in a very enjoyable evening.