The transition period from dry cow to milking cow has been an area for focus in the industry over recent years. Lots of research and studies have identified that is typically the period when cows struggle most with health issues.

As a consequence this is the period where most health care costs are incurred and where most productivity is lost with cows failing reach their expected peak production, impaired fertility and increased culling. In addition the focus on reducing the amount of antimicrobials used in livestock farming can have most impact when transition is more successful.

The challenges faced in this period can be categorized as metabolic such as milk fever and ketosis or slow fever and immune system challenges such as metritis and mastitis. The interaction of metabolic health and the immune function is also significant ensuring that both areas need to be addressed to avoid health and production issues.

Over the last couple of months our vet team have been collecting blood samples from fresh calved cows (<30 DIM) which are presented to them on farm for clinical examination to measure blood ketones. We have results from 101 cows so far and 79 of these have had either clinical or sub-clinical ketosis indicating poor transition and poor metabolic health. 52 cows tested had clinical ketosis but perhaps the most significant group of cows are the 27 which had sub-clinical ketosis and in many cases go unidentified and untreated resulting in undetected financial losses. Ketosis is often referred to as a gateway disease as it is often involved in other health problems and your cows are no different, of the 101 cows sampled 30 were diagnosed with abomasal displacement and 22 had metritis both of which are costly conditions as they impact yield and fertility.

The aim of this project is to raise awareness of the challenges and costs incurred during the transition period and to engage in reducing the risks during the transition period on individual farms. We plan to continue sampling fresh cows across the practice and to follow the lactation progress of those identified as having ketosis. We have a range of resources available to help record and measure transition success and identify areas for action and most importantly we have a great team of vets who are equipped to identify the key areas for action and come up with practical advice to help ensure more of your cows have a successful transition.

**Transition monitoring**

![Ketosis Results Chart](image)
Whether you are using natural mating or AI the principles are the same, good quality semen needs to be available at the right stage in the cow’s oestrus cycle to achieve fertilisation and pregnancy. With AI this requires a structured approach to heat detection and an action plan for animals not observed in heat, one thing we can guarantee in reproduction is that cows which aren’t served won’t get pregnant!

If you are relying on bulls and natural mating then a breeding soundness examination is a must. So far this year we have tested more than 50 bulls and continue to find problem bulls. UK surveys consistently report that around 20% or 1 in every 5 bulls is significantly sub fertile or infertile which matches our findings. A breeding soundness examination includes semen collection and assessment as well as a physical examination. The housed period is typically high risk for bull lameness so ensure his feet are sound and correct before you expect him to go leaping around! Aim for a BCS of 3.5 for your bulls at the start of the breeding period, bulls which are too fat have reduced libido, the target is for the bull to be fit but not fat! Don’t forget to include the bull in your herd vaccinations for BVD, IBR and Lepto too.

Parasite planning

Despite the recent cold spell, which brought a covering of snow after first cut for some, grass growth has been good this spring and lots of stock are enjoying good grazing. Ensure that you have a parasite control plan in place to avoid heavy gut worm burdens and lungworm problems. Fly control should also be on the agenda at this stage in the year even though they aren’t causing a problem yet. Applying fly control products early in the season will help avoid the massive explosion in fly number later in the year. Speak to one of the vets or the team at Beeston Animal Health for more help on your parasite control plan.

GIVE SALLY A CALL TO GET YOUR BULL BOOKED IN FOR HIS PRE-BREEDING MOT