

Macalister Demonstration Farm

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Macalister Demonstration Farm Update 385 (Week ending October 17th, 2014)

Planning for the 2014 mating period commenced well before calving. In particular, Becky, Bridget from Southern Stockfeeds and I sat down together to tackle the high incidence of milk fever typically experienced at the MDF around calving time. Not only are milk fever cows labour intensive to nurse but the flow on effects of both clinical and subclinical milk fever are significant. For every one cow that goes down with milk fever (clinical) in any given herd there are approximately 8 cows with low blood calcium that do not show any external signs (subclinical). Low blood calcium reduces uterine muscle contraction necessary for expulsion of foetal membranes and also prevents the immune system from functioning normally. Therefore, in herds with high incidences of milk fever there is also likely to be a high incidence of uterine diseases affecting herd reproductive performance. With a carefully formulated transition program Becky has managed to reduce the number of clinical milk fever cases from 25-30% to less than 7%. In early September, the first round of cows were Metrichchecked[®] to identify and treat cases of endometritis. Of the 220 cows checked, only 15 (6.8%) required treatment which is down from 9% in the 2013 calving/joining period. The remaining cows will be Metrichchecked[®] this week.

Pre-mating heat detection has already commenced. Tail-painting of the herd 30 days prior to mating start date (MSD) enables the early identification of non-visible oestrus cows (NVOs; also known as 'non-cyclers'). These will be submitted for an OvSynch[®] plus CIDR[®] program and will be inseminated on MSD. The conception rates of NVO cows are typically low at the first insemination so by identifying and treating them as early as possible there will be more opportunities for those which do not conceive initially to get in calf to AI. Using a similar program in 2013, the reproductive performance of the NVOs was similar to the rest of the herd. Cycling cows will be synchronized with a double PG program.

Lease bulls will be arriving in late November and will be fertility tested by the Maffra Veterinary Centre. This involves both a comprehensive physical examination as well as lab testing of semen. In 2013, two of the 12 bulls failed so it was fortunate that these were identified and replaced prior to the bulls going in.

Target joining weights for heifers is based on 65% of mature cow weight but it was difficult to ascertain what this actually was based on cull cow records. This is because older cows tended to be higher in Holstein-Friesian breed content than yearlings. Therefore, a proportion of the younger cows in the herd were weighed and a mature cow weight of 480kg was determined. Based on this, a proportion of the yearling heifers are still too light. As a consequence, a decision has been made for this year that only those heifers weighing 312kg or heavier will be enrolled in a Fixed-Time AI (FTAI) program as in previous years. The major advantage of FTAI is that all heifers are submitted and inseminated on the first day of mating which reduces labour and potential for human error associated with daily heat detection. In addition, provided conception rates are maximized by having well grown heifers and close adherence to the program, the submission of 100% of heifers for AI on

Day 1 should result in an overall higher AI pregnancy rate. However, the program is not without additional costs so the ability to objectively identify those too light through regular weighing has been very advantageous.

Written by *Stephanie Bullen* BV Biol/BVSc (Hons)
Dairy Resident - University of Melbourne
Maffra Veterinary Centre
10 Johnson Street
Maffra, VIC, 3860
(03) 5147 1177

Matt Harms
ONFARM Consulting

0408 311 118
matt@onfarmconsulting.com.au
www.onfarmconsulting.com.au
PO Box 697, Leongatha, Vic 3953