



# PREPARING FOR AUTUMN CALVING

After the heat wave, it seems strange that the weather has turned autumnal so quickly and that we are about to start preparing cows to dry off for the autumn block of calving.

## Preparation

The last few weeks of lactation are the time to ensure cows are going to go dry in the best possible health, nicely gaining a bit of body condition to end up at a score of 3 - 3.25 in the two weeks pre-calving. It is very important to manage condition while the cow is still milking, not when she is dry. This is due to the way she utilizes and partitions the energy she is being fed. Now is the time to evaluate the cows to be dried off and either feed a little more for condition or pull a little back if they are too fat. Recent work would suggest thin cows (BCS 2.75 and lower) are just as big a problem as fat cows through the transition period.

All four hooves need to be picked up and given a routine trim. Trimming must be done before all the complexities of calving take place, namely the complete dilation or softening of muscles to allow the calf to be born. Muscle preparation starts weeks before the birth, hence trimming must be done before dry off and, ideally, never whilst dry. Care in the crush is paramount as we don't want to spoil all the hard work getting her pregnant then go and ruin it by being heavy handed and overzealous at this late stage.

## Drying Off

Drying off protocols need to be conducted as if you were preparing for an operation. Pressure is being applied from processors and buyers to reduce the use of all antibiotics including intra-mammary dry cow tubes. Opting for teat sealants only increases the attention to detail needed when applying. Use rubber gloves to prepare the teat and cleanse it thoroughly. Then surgically wipe them or dip again. Time of administration is also vital. This should be done as soon as her last milking has finished. Too many cows are segregated out and left in a pen until the end of milking and then brought through the parlour again or worse, put in a crush to be tubed.

If a cow has had a cell count below 150 for the last few milk tests, then sealant only will be sufficient. It is worth keeping a tally of the last SCC pre-dry off and the first post-calving – this is a good measure of mastitis management success. Please consult your vet for additional advice.



## So, now that she is dry, what now?

Well, we certainly won't be giving her the top grab off the silage clamp because it's too hot or gone mouldy. Or turning her into a field with no grass as she is a bit fat so needs to lose some weight – good rumen fill is vital! These animals need the best care on the farm.

This is the time for her to rest and repair. Dry cow paddocks and silage are a great idea – old leys with little or no fertiliser applied, to reduce energy and potassium content, can help hugely. Whether you opt for a one diet system or split for far-off and close-up cows, we can help. Our Ruminant Feed Specialists have all the tools to ensure that these cows transition in top order.

Our FiMLAC Dry Cow Rolls are ideal for feeding out at grass or as part of a TMR at just 2kg per head per day. Carefully balanced with vitamins and minerals, based on the latest nutritional guidelines, to help support your cows transition in the best shape possible. Specialist products to help support liver function are also included.

## More Information

**Talk to your Feed Specialist about preparing for an effective autumn calving or call the office on 01477 536300.**

