



SETTING GOALS AND MEASURING FOR INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

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Setting goals and measuring progress towards these goals is critical in the youngstock rearing period, as it allows you to fully understand the details of your herd's productivity and what could be influencing it. Once you know where the problems are you can get started on fixing them.

Only you can set goals for your farm but your vet, nutritionist and other health advisors can all play an important role in helping you to set and measure your progress towards the goals. Begin by deciding your own main objectives and identifying any areas of calf health and performance which concern you presently. You should review your goals every 6 to 12 months with your animal health advisors to check progress and make sure the goals are still relevant.

Below are some examples of what could be measured and analysed on your farm to identify improvement areas to help maximise herd health, productivity and profit.

MORTALITY

Recording and analysing mortality levels of certain age groups can illustrate particular issues with different stages in the youngstock rearing process. Mortality should be measured at:

- ◆ Birth
- ◆ Birth to weaning
- ◆ Weaning to 1st calving or finishing (dependent on if beef or dairy)

COLOSTRUM MANAGEMENT

It is important to follow the 5 Qs of colostrum management (Quantity, Quality, Quickly, sQueaky clean and Quantify) – for further information please refer to our Practical Colostrum Management leaflet. Recording colostrum delivery and analysing against the presence of disease and growth rates of your youngstock can help to improve your farm's colostrum management protocol.





DISEASE

Scour and pneumonia are important youngstock diseases but any disease in the youngstock period can have an impact on future productivity. Measuring disease incidence and assessing against colostrum management, growth rate and age against 1st calving/finishing can show the true impacts and costs of disease in the youngstock period.

Your vet can help you to come up with protocols for managing disease on your farm.

GROWTH RATES

Measuring growth rates to establish the daily live weight gain is a great way of keeping productivity on track in your herd. Analysing growth rates vs. the presence of disease and feed volumes can show the impact the disease and differing feeding volumes or frequencies have on your productivity.

FEED VOLUMES

Feed costs are one of the largest draws on a farm's finances. Recording volumes fed and their costs for analysis vs. growth rates can indicate the animals and feeding protocols which lead to the most efficient and profitable feed conversion.

Daily intakes of concentrate feeds before and after weaning are also important to measure. Developing a healthy rumen by the weaning stage is an important objective for calf health.

AGE AT 1ST CALVING OR FINISHING

This is the ultimate end goal of the youngstock rearing process. Measuring this and identifying the factors which have led to the success of your best animals will allow you to improve your processes to maximise productivity in your herd.

Dairy heifers should be well grown at first calving; at least 85% of mature size. Calving at around two years old is more profitable, but heifers must be well grown too.

Once you have set the goals for your farm, make sure you communicate these to everyone working on the farm so that the whole team is working together.