



***Setting goals and measuring progress towards these goals is critical for suckler herd management, as they enable you to fully understand the details of your herd's productivity, what could be influencing it and how management changes could increase productivity. Once you know where any 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 set and measure your progress towards the goals. Begin by deciding your own main objectives and identifying any areas of herd or calf health and performance which concern you presently. You should review your goals every 6-12 months with your advisors to check progress and make sure the goals are still relevant.

Below are some examples of what can be measured and analysed to help maximise herd health, productivity and profitability. The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and relevant records which can be analysed to track the impact of management changes are covered in each section below. Please refer back to the other information sheets for further detail on the importance of these measures.

### FERTILITY AND PREGNANCY

In order to assess fertility and pregnancy performance, collecting and assessing information related to the overall pregnancy rate (including the length of service period used to achieve that rate) along with the proportion of cows calving in each 3 week cycle help to understand the overall efficiency of the breeding programme in the herd.

Average age at first calving allows us to assess heifer performance as improvements in herd profitability from calving at 2 years old are well documented. However, achieving this goal does rely on being able to drive rapid growth rates which cannot be achieved in all systems and so this goal should be adapted to be realistic for the individual farm.

#### Information to be collected:

- Number of cows/heifers to bull and groups
- Service period
- PD results +/- twinning
- Individual cow calving dates and level of assistance
- Cow treatment records and incidence of metabolic and periparturient diseases, e.g. hypocalcaemia, ketosis, metritis, mastitis, retained foetal membranes
- Cow body condition scores
- Metabolic profile results and rationing

#### Key Performance Indicators:

- Pregnancy rate
- % calving in first 3/6/9 weeks
- Average age at first calving
- Stillbirth rate

## CALF PERFORMANCE

Once a calf has been successfully born on farm, many factors can impact on its survival and growth rate.

Knowledge of birth and weaning weights (and ideally serial measurements in between these points) not only allows calculation and analysis of Daily Liveweight Gain (DLWG) but also allows accurate dosing of medicines. This also helps to facilitate nutritional management of groups which may be underperforming.

Failure of Passive Transfer (FPT) can lead to increased rates of disease such as scour and pneumonia in youngstock, and lead to increased antibiotic use on farm. Assessment of disease and mortality rates alongside treatment and diagnostic results can highlight areas of concern and allow discussion of potential areas for improvement.

### Information to be collected:

- Calf birth weights and dates, level of assistance
- Calf weaning weights and dates
- Disease and treatment records
- Diagnostic results
- Colostrum feeding records

### Key Performance Indicators:

- Calf mortality rate
- Average Daily Liveweight Gain

## HERD PERFORMANCE

Profitability of a suckler herd is directly related to the number of calves weaned per 100 cows and heifers mated annually – this is therefore used as a KPI for Herd Performance.

A number of the factors mentioned in the preceding sections will directly impact on this final figure, so it is important to use a broad analysis to identify where any losses are occurring.

The death of a suckler cow is very costly financially, as it usually has the additional result of a lost pregnancy or poor growth of her suckling calf. Treatment records can indicate disease problems which may lead to higher rates of forced culling, e.g. lameness.

As discussed previously, heifer growth rates must hit required targets if calving at 2 years old, and appropriate management is required to ensure heifer growth is maintained during the first lactation.

### Information to be collected:

- Culling records and reasons (forced vs. voluntary)
- Cow deaths
- Replacement heifer numbers
- Treatment records
- Heifer growth rates

### Key Performance Indicators:

- % calves weaned per 100 cows and heifers mated
- Replacement rate



*Once you have set the goals for your farm, make sure you communicate these to the whole team so everyone is working together towards a common goal.*