

Managing Replacement Stock

Managing replacement stock and optimising performance of your heifer rearing enterprise is key to the future income and profitability of the dairy herd.

Every dairy farm must consider the following:

Age at First Calving

Variations in calving age may be attributed to any of a number of factors including

- 1) Age at first service as a result of poor early growth.
- 2) Poor heifer fertility
- 3) Management decision to calve heifers later than 24 months.

With recent studies showing that heifers calving at 23 – 25 months are outperforming their later calving counterparts in terms of fertility, milk production and survival over their first five years of life it is easy to see the benefits of a tight calving pattern.

The impact of weight for age is important as dairy cows continue to grow until the end of their third lactation. Animals which are not well grown will have a greater nutrient demand for growth alone, and this will be at the expense of fertility. Heifers need to be big enough yet not over conditioned i.e. **“Fit rather than fat”**

Milk Production

Animals calving at less than 26 months tend to have similarly high productivity spending 46% of their lives in milk compared to animals calving at around 30 months that spend only 34% of their lives in milk on average.

Growth During The Rearing Period

The recommended age a first calving for Holstein Friesians is 23-24 months, at approximately 85 – 90% of their mature body weight.

Nutrition

The conversion of feed into growth occurs most efficiently in animals during the first few months of life and in order to achieve target breeding age and weight in a cost effective manner only the best quality milk/milk replacers and concentrates should be sourced for this period.

Setting Targets and Monitoring Growth

@ It is of the upmost importance to set growth targets i.e. 55% - 60% of mature body weight at first breeding

@ Weigh calves at birth and again when handling e.g. Vaccination

@ Use the same measuring method consistently

As a rule of thumb if a mature body weight of the animal is 600kg, the target body weight at first breeding at 13 to 14 months is 330 to 360kg. To achieve this body weight a 40kg calf at birth will need gain 290 to 320kg over about 410 days – which requires an average daily gain of at least 0.75kg every day of the rearing period until first breeding.

- Suggested live weights for age of different breeds of heifer.

Age (months)	Holstein/Friesian	NZ x British Friesian	Jersey/Holstein Fr
Birth	38	36	34
3 months	107	102	95
6 months	177	169	158
14/15 months	336	321	299
22/24 months	550	525	490

Summary

@ Heifer performance in terms of fertility, milk production and survivability is a key driver of on farm profitability.

@ Improved monitoring of growth at regular intervals, with appropriate adjustments to the rearing and feeding programme, will help to ensure that all animals within a group achieve the minimum target growth rate and weight for age.

@ The heifer calf is a key driver for future farm profitability and is a key asset that must be carefully monitored and managed from the moment it is born.

Avoca Heifer Gold 16%

Get the most out of your herd by achieving those target weights for age with our new specially formulated heifer rearing ration. This tasty ration is blended with the finest nutrient sources such as flake maize making it high in energy, allowing your animals to thrive consistently and maintain daily live-weight gains. It also contains all essential minerals and vitamins to ensure the full growth potential of these heifers are realized.

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