



I'm sure we're all relieved to be finally coming out of the hot weather and welcoming the slightly colder temperatures. Reflecting on the recent challenges of milk price, penalties for overproduction and a hot summer, now is a good time to focus on maximising efficiency across the herd.

The recent heat has brought additional costs and challenges to many dairy businesses, including increased feed, energy and water costs, greater reliance on cooling infrastructure, increased vet costs and reduced fertility. Heat stress will also have longer-term implications particularly on milk production and fertility.

Understandably, people are trying to cut costs where they can - which can often mean cutting vaccinations, changing to a cheaper milk powder alternative or making cuts in nutrition. Decisions such as these can increase costs in the long-term. The focus should instead be on getting the best return from every input and focusing long-term.



CULLING DECISIONS

When margins are tight, it is important to regularly review which cows are contributing positively to the business. A useful starting point is to calculate the approximate amount of milk a cow needs to produce to cover her feed costs. This gives a simple benchmark for identifying cows that are struggling to justify their place in the herd. The decision should also consider the cost of replacing her and the potential value of another lactation.

As a rough tool, a cow's net value can be calculated from the following:

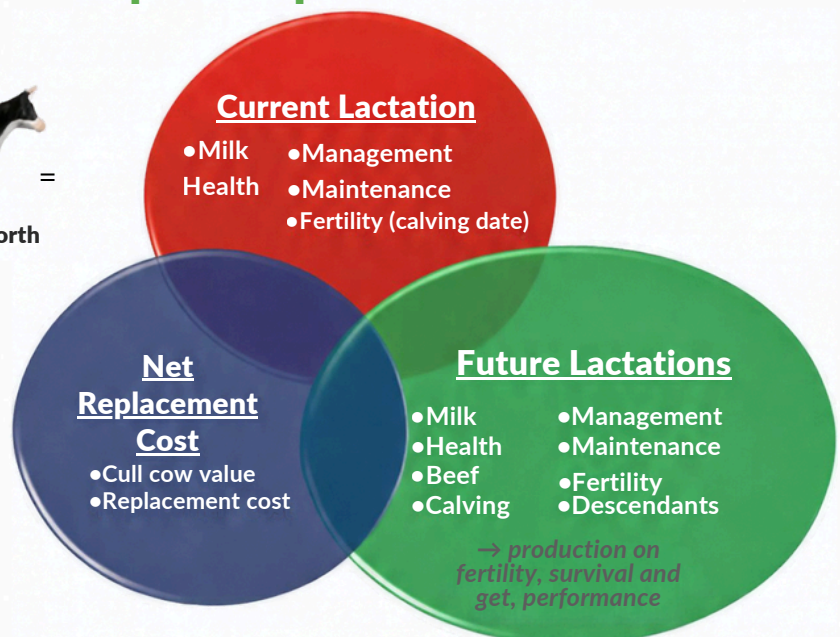
$$\text{Cow value} = (\text{milk price} \times \text{milk per lactation}) - \text{annual feed cost}$$

Culling decisions should consider more than milk yield alone. Feed costs, fertility, mastitis, lameness, Johne's, TB, age and expected future performance all influence the value of keeping a cow. The ICBF Cow's Own Worth (C.O.W.) tool can be useful to bring all these factors together to help identify cows with lower future profit potential. It must be used alongside good farm records but can be an extra tool when considering culling decisions.



Cow's Own Worth

Expected profit from:



It is important to consider the level of involuntary culls that we have due to lameness, fertility or mastitis. A high level of involuntary culls can indicate an underlying issue and one that needs addressing.



Heifer rearing

Heifer rearing is a significant investment, AHDB states it is the second-largest annual expense for dairy farms, accounting for about 20% of production costs.

Although a lot can influence how many heifers are reared on farm, such as TB pressures and fertility, getting the numbers right is important as rearing too many heifers is expensive. AHDB claim rearing a dairy heifer typically costs between £1,800 and £3,000. They have a useful dairy heifer rearing cost calculator worth having a look at.

With good management of heifers, they will repay investment costs with higher milk production and longer productive life. This includes:

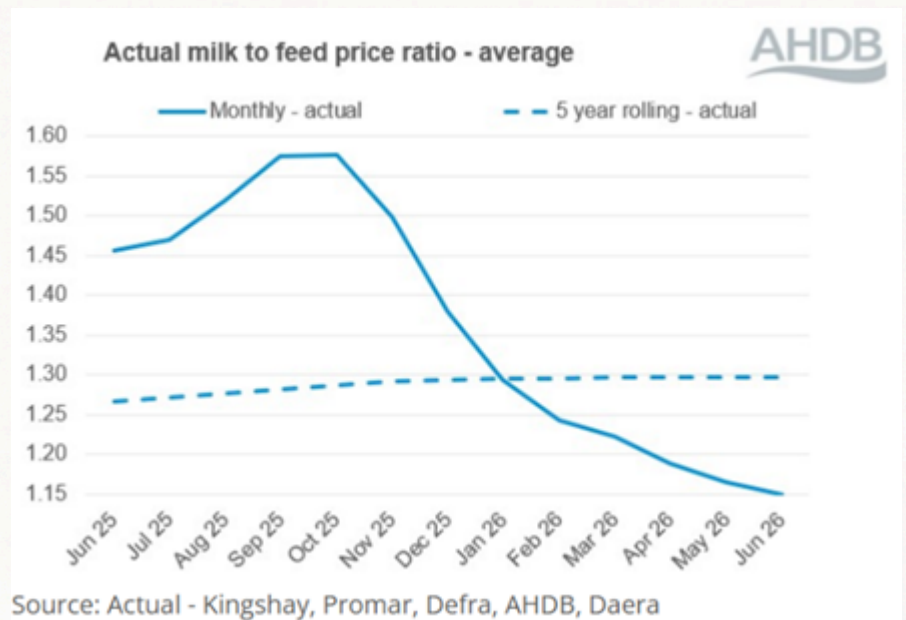
-  Good colostrum management and ongoing nutrition
-  Monitoring and achieving good calf growth rates
-  Good calf disease management and husbandry procedures
-  Age at first calving – 24 months

 **RVC research shows calving at 24 months rather than 26 months reduces average rearing costs by 16%.** Meaning the cost of rearing a heifer increases by £2.87 per day for every day increase in age at first calving over 24 months.

Other opportunities to improve efficiency

-  **- Feed efficiency and milk from forage**
 - When milk price is poor, feed is often the first area to be reviewed. Doing this without a strategy can have detrimental effects on herd health and long term performance. Make the most of home grown forage and use purchased feed strategically. Use Milk to Feed Price ratio to show the value of milk compared with the cost of purchased feed.

-  **- Transition cow management** - Last month's newsletter focused on transition. The transition period is an area where small management failures can become expensive problems later in lactation.



Jess



Great talks ranging from:

- Creating resilient gut
- What's new in the world of colostrum
- Does heat stress affect calves?
- Update from the GB Calf Strategy

CALF CONVENTION

Wednesday 21st October

9.30am- 3pm

Hartpury College

GL19 3EB

Farmer Panel

Range of Trade Stands

to buy tickets please contact us on 01666 823035