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VETERINARY PREGNANCY TESTING – WHY DO IT?

When out in the field we are often asked “What are the benefits of pregnancy testing my beef herd?”. In any beef or dairy cattle enterprise, the continual identification of unproductive stock is essential to ensure ongoing herd productivity. One way to make sure you are keeping only reproductively sound animals in your herd is to implement annual pregnancy testing.



BENEFITS OF PREGNANCY TESTING

Identifying any “freeloaders” in your herd – more cash in your pocket

Pregnancy testing allows you to accurately identify not only pregnant cows but also unproductive females that can be culled from the herd. An empty cow means no income or cash flow. Like any production business, when you have faulty equipment (an infertile cow), it needs to be replaced with working equipment in order to secure production (calves) and income into the future. Holding onto an unproductive cow is actually costing you money. Not only are you potentially feeding her unnecessary supplements, the grass that she is eating could be consumed by a healthy and productive cow or provide more dry feed for the rest of your herd in a bad season.

Tightening your calving interval

In many cases, your veterinarian can give you an approximate foetal age and likely calving date following rectal palpation. Overall, this will aid in general herd management and can importantly control your calving spread. By pregnancy testing early, you can identify which cows will be dropping at the optimum time of year (Aug-Oct) just before grass nutrition is at its peak and at the start of the growing season. Identifying and potentially removing cows that will calve outside the optimum time allows you as a producer to utilise periods of high pasture availability, produce early maturing replacement cattle and reap the economic benefits of uniform weights at sale.

Early Weaning

In less than average seasons, it is important to look after your breeding herd both now and into the future. Weaning calves off cows earlier means cows can get back to an ideal body condition score earlier, provide adequately for the calf they are pregnant with and then reconceive earlier next season.

Disease Control

A major advantage with pregnancy testing your herd is identifying any potential reproductive diseases in your herd early. Diseases prevalent in our area include Leptospirosis, Vibrio and Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Virus (Pestivirus), which can all result in very low conception rates (down to 30% in some instances). Early detection and management of all reproductive diseases can save huge losses in your beef herd.

When booking your pregnancy testing with us, ask us to provide you with all your vaccinations. Significant economic savings can be made by only vaccinating pregnant animals.

TIMING OF PREGNANCY TESTING

Generally, the most convenient time for handling cows is at weaning and pregnancy testing can be easily organised to coincide with this. Ideally, cows should be pregnancy testing at least eight weeks after the bull has been removed and before the dry season where pasture availability will be low.

MANUAL v ULTRASOUND PREGNANCY TESTING

Ultrasonography is advantageous when wanting to age foetuses within a couple of weeks or pick up on early pregnancies. It is used predominantly in dairy cattle where accurate dry off dates are needed. Rectal palpation is much faster and equally as accurate when performed by a qualified, experienced veterinarian. We use both methods depending on the situation.

WHAT IF I DON'T PREGNANCY TEST?

Some producers choose not to pregnancy test on the grounds of cost. Instead they may choose to either detect pregnancy in cows by monitoring return to heat or simply seeing how many calves drop! Although this may seem like a money saver, if you happen to have bull issues or a reproductive disease outbreak during that time, by not detecting the problem early you are simply hanging onto empty cows for an extra 6-12 months. Costs associated with feeding empty cattle will always outweigh the costs of getting a veterinarian to pregnancy test your herd.

A property with 200 breeders in a well run healthy herd can have an expected conception rate of at least 85%. Cost to pregnancy test would be approximately \$450 with good yard facilities. By identifying cows that are empty early, we are saving money on grass, supplements and herd health treatments.

Pregnancy Testing @ 85% conception rate = 30 empty cows in 200 breeders – these cows can now be sold early	COST = \$450 SAVING = \$3000
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NOT pregnancy testing = 30 empty cows were not detected so they have cost the following	COST = \$3520 SAVING = \$0
- consumed ~\$2160 grass (\$3/hd/wk for 6 months)	
- consumed ~\$1260 winter protein supplement (30c/hd/day June-Oct)	
- required ~\$100/hd animal health treatment (tick treatment etc)	

WHAT CAN I DO TO IMPROVE MY PREGNANCY RATES?

Multimin is an injectable product that can be used to 'top-up' trace minerals (Zn, Se, Mn, Cu) that are deficient in dry times and are crucial for not only growth in cattle but also reproduction.

- Cows should be given multimin a month before joining and a month before calving. This will help ovulation, development of the foetus, transfer of passive immunity and it will also assist animals during the stressful time of calving and lactation.
- Calves should be treated at weaning. This not only helps their immunity it also increases growth rates and protects them from non-infectious diseases, such as white muscle disease, and abnormal bone growth.
- Bulls should be treated about three months prior to joining as Multimin increases the sperm count and semen quality of these important animals.

SO WHY PREGNANCY TEST?

Non-pregnant cows are unproductive and should be removed from the herd. Pregnancy testing is a cheap and convenient method of identifying empty cows at an early stage. Pregnancy testing can also identify herd fertility problems, enabling earlier investigation and action than would otherwise be possible. It is an essential process to implement into your annual herd management system so reap the rewards and get you're herd tested this year.

Contact us to book in your pregnancy testing this season!

This information sheet is not intended as a substitute for a veterinary consultation.

It is recommended that a consultation be arranged with a veterinary practitioner if you have any concerns with your herd's health.