



Win/Win Heifer Grazing

VetSouth

LTD

**Hayden Dore Veterinarian
Vet South**



Win/Win Heifer Grazing – Owner

- Heifers are in calf early, empty rate <5%
- 95% plus reach target liveweights at 15mths and 22 months of age.
- They come home in a body condition score of 5.5 ready for calving
- Low death rate < 3 %



Win/Win Heifer Grazing - Grazier

- Calves turn up at or over target weaning weights
- Calves transitioned well
- Owner contactable
- Calves have a negative BVD status
- Good animal health plan
- Paid well and on time

Topics

- Current situation
- Are your heifers under performing?
- What are the targets?
- Is closing the gap worth it?
- The grazing relationship





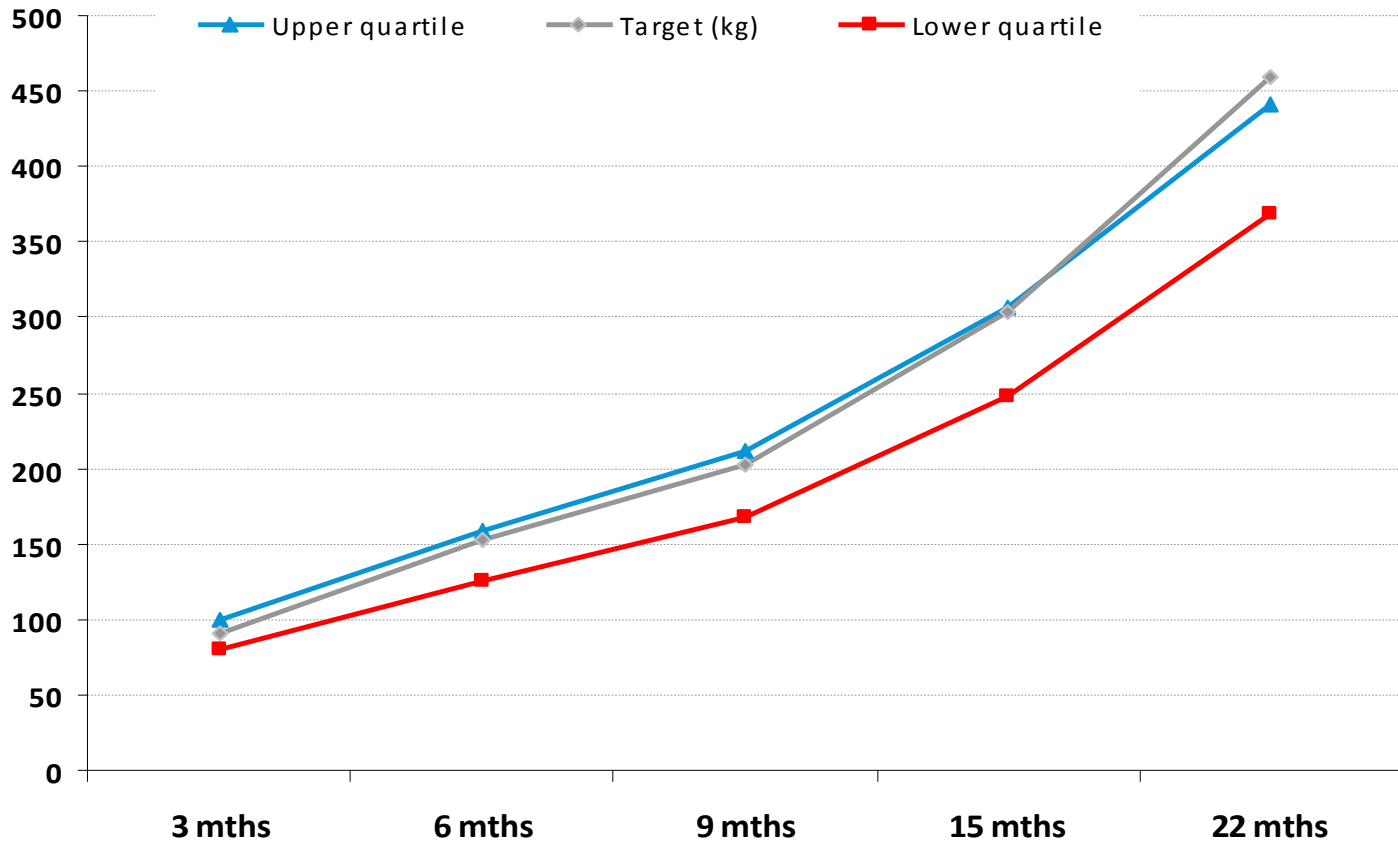
Current Situation

- New Zealand heifers are failing to meet their target liveweights by the time they reach the herd.



The average weight of a 22 month animal was 52kg (11%) below target. BUT the lower

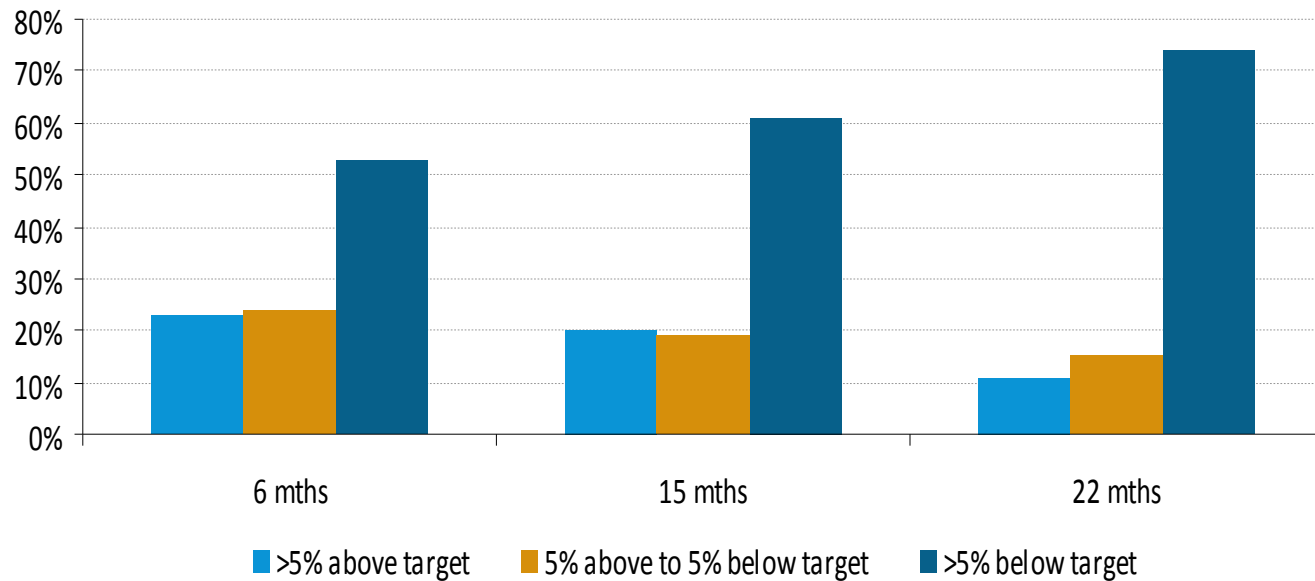
Heifer Liveweights



73% were more than 5% below their target liveweight at 22 months of age

Heifer Liveweight Trends

% of animals 5% above target, with 5% of target and below 5% of target



Are your heifers under performing?

- Do 2 & 3 year olds feature in empties?
- Do 2 yo heifers have a slow calving pattern?
- Do three year olds calve at a slow rate?
- Do first calvers have a poor submission rate?
- Are first calvers as tall as the mature cows?



What are the Targets?

Mature cow liveweight (kg)	400	450	500	550	600
<i>Liveweight Breeding Value (lwtBV)</i>	<i>-103</i>	<i>-53</i>	<i>-3</i>	<i>+47</i>	<i>+97</i>
3 months (18% of mature liveweight)	70	80	90	100	110
6 months (30% of mature liveweight)	120	135	150	165	180
9 months (40% of mature liveweight)	160	180	200	220	240
12 months (50% of mature liveweight)	200	225	250	275	300
15 months (60% of mature liveweight)	240	270	300	330	360
18 months (73% of mature liveweight)	290	330	365	400	440
22 months (90% of mature liveweight)	360	405	450	495	540

Is closing the gap worth it?

- Large amount of research showing a positive response in terms of milk production and fertility.
- Heavier heifers are better able to compete for feed once they enter the herd
- They put more energy into milk production rather than growth.



Is closing the gap worth it?

- Meeting liveweight targets at 22 months will yield a milk production response of between **0.25-0.48kg of milk solids per extra kg of liveweight** up to their target in the first lactation.
- For example, the average heifer from LIC data is 52kg underweight. Getting her to target will yield an extra **13 – 25kgMS**.



The Grazing Relationship

Graziers

- Are graziers doing their job?
- You pay them well
- Is that enough to expect results?
- End result is NZ heifers are under weight
- Dairy farmers are also paying for that loss
- If the current method is not working we need a change in approach



Current approach to grazing

- Pretty loose – “I need grazing, you’ve got grazing so lets hook up” Agents facilitate this. All pretty easy.
- Expectations of target liveweights?
- Underweight heifers arriving at the grazier, transition off milk sometimes questionable
- BVD status



Current approach to grazing

- Don't bother weighing
- Turn up to drench and give an eye appraisal
- Hard to get hold of for sick animals
- Complain only at the end when you take them away



A better approach

- Do your homework to find a good grazier, then keep him
- Need a good relationship with them
- Set out expectations – sit down over a coffee
- Give him your animal health plan
- Check if he grazes other heifers or beef stock – Whats their drenching plan and BVD status?





A better approach

- Supply him with some antibiotics and your vets number
- Identification eg, ear mark, or sheep tags
- Make it easy for him

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A better approach

- Have a conversation around feeding
- Put it into his language
- May have to tutor on feeding management
- Nothing personal, can be a bit awkward, but you are talking business
- Monitor = regular weighing
- Be realistic with growth rates





A better approach

- Be prepared to have the tough conversation when things are not going to plan.
- If things are not going to expectation be prepared to find alternative grazing
- When things are going well say thanks, I appreciate it. Bottles of wine, crayfish.



In summary

- Find a good grazier and keep him
- Set expectations
- Supply an animal health plan
- Talk feeding
- Weighing
- Have the tough conversations
- Be prepared to change graziers if you have exhausted all other means of sorting the issues



Thank You

- Judith O'Neil from LIC
- My colleagues from VetSouth
- Allan Topham – Hedgehope Dairy farmer and heifer grazier

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Questions

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