Win/Win Heifer Grazing

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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 quartile were 90kg (20%) below target.
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

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6 mths
- >5% above target
- 5% above to 5% below target
- >5% below target

15 mths
- >5% above target
- 5% above to 5% below target
- >5% below target

22 mths
- >5% above target
- 5% above to 5% below target
- >5% below target

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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?

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