

BENEFITS OF PREGNANCY TESTING CATTLE.

As Gunnedah heads into another dry winter, pregnancy testing is an important management tool that should be considered by producers. Pregnancy testing allows identification of unproductive females so that they can be culled from the herd, creating an economically and reproductively more efficient herd. Pregnancy testing also allows identification of serious herd problems, including infectious diseases which limit fertility, as well as bull problems and management problems such as inadequate nutrition.

If one considers that a mature cow will consume 8 kg of dry matter per day. Without pregnancy testing the cow will not be identified as empty until the end of the calving period. If pasture costs around 4c/kg, this equates to a minimum of \$10 per month that the cow is costing while producing nothing. If hay or grain is being fed, she is costing much more. Consultants estimate the cost benefit per cow identified as non-pregnant is around \$100 per cow, in a good season.

On the other hand, heifers with their calves at foot, at 2 years of age, will need to harvest 10-14kg of dry matter daily to give enough energy to support their first calf, cycle and get pregnant. At a time when feed resources are limited, pregnancy testing allows empty cows to be culled and younger, more efficient animals to be managed better.

The advantage of pregnancy testing heifers and cows each year is that producers can ascertain the number pregnant, the expected spread and pattern of calving and are selecting for more fertile animals which are adapted to their particular environment. Culling on a simple pregnancy test each year weeds out those cows that, are of low fertility, are of poor constitution and therefore do not conceive and cows that milk too much and therefore do not conceive. This enables the breeding season to be shortened and management to become more efficient. Surplus females can be sold to advantage if they are pregnancy tested in calf.

The mature cow group generates the largest amount of income in a commercial herd. With a tight joining and calving they will produce a very good, even line of weaners. Earlier calves make more money and for every day the average calving date is shortened in a 100-cow herd, \$100 is generated if 1kg liveweight is worth \$1.

The pattern of foetal age should reflect that 60-70% of cows become pregnant in the first 3 weeks of the breeding season and around 85-90% are pregnant by 6 weeks. An obvious gap in this pattern may indicate a temporary bull breakdown. A poor result in one mating group as compared to other similarly managed mating groups may indicate a bull fertility problem and a variation in foetal age with no pattern and big age spread may indicate disease. If you have any further questions, please discuss them with your veterinarian.

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