



Cornwall and Devon Post late March issue

Westpoint SouthWest vet Rachel Risdon has recently given birth to her first child, and has handed over the reins to Philip Elkins, from the Winnards Perch branch, for this month's veterinary column. Whilst this is obviously a happy time for the Risdon household, it did get me thinking about planning. Farmers and vets are notoriously bad at planning. We all try to do it, but often get bogged down in the detail. Here are a few examples that demonstrate the importance of planning, and why your vet should be involved.

Block calving herds rely on a heavily front loaded calving pattern to get the maximum benefit. Cows which are not showing visible signs of heat (Oestrus Not Observed - ONO) can easily counteract any good work done with the rest of the herd. Ideally ONO cows should be synchronised to be served on the first day of mating. The best protocol takes 10 days to synchronise, and to select those cows not cycling takes at least one cycle (three weeks). That means heat detection must start five weeks before the planned start of mating, or about 45 days after calving starts. Vets should be an integral part of fertility planning meetings for block calving herds to ensure the maximum fertility benefits. Maximising lamb returns requires an awareness of why you are losing animals. To do this you need accurate scanning, lambing, weaning and finished percentages. If you can target one specific area, such as pre-weaning losses, the potential gains will be greatest – tackling a coccidiosis problem, for example, can reap massive rewards. Without recording the figures in the first place and comparing these with targets, you will never know how your herd is performing. A post lambing review should be routine for all flocks.

We all know that heifer weights are essential for good performance in lactation, with a minimum target of 65% of adult weight at bulling, and 95% at calving. Routinely weigh all your heifers, preferably every three months, to make sure they are achieving target live weight gains. Westpoint employs technicians who are trained in many facets of farm management including heifer weighing. If heifers are not growing quickly enough, this will be highlighted, and in particular the stage at which their growth is reduced. Appropriate management changes can then be made to ensure target weights are met.

At Westpoint, we strongly believe in a team approach to farm management, and in particular herd management. Farmers, herdsman, bank managers, nutritionists, advisors and vets all get involved. The end goal is the same for everyone – maximising the profitability of the business.