Webinar summary: Setting the cow up for success – Dry cow management

This webinar focuses on the importance of managing the dry period for cows to ensure their optimal recovery and performance post-calving. It discusses key strategies for achieving the right condition, nutritional requirements, and use of technology to track progress.

In this webinar:

1. What we aim to achieve over the dry period

- The dry period is crucial for rebuilding fat, protein, and mineral stores, strengthening rumen and immune function, and ensuring recovery of milk secretory cells and liver capacity.
- The goal is to have cows at a condition score (BCS) of 4.8–5.2 at calving to maximise milk production, fertility, and overall health post-calving.

2. Ideal length of dry period

- The dry period should ideally last between 50 to 70 days, with a minimum of 45 days to allow sufficient udder recovery.
- Longer than 80 days can lead to reduced milk production, fertility issues, and increased metabolic risks.

3. Using the dry period to get the cow 'match-fit'

- Ensuring cows have adequate fibre (NDF >45%) to maintain rumen function and muscle fitness is key.
- Maintaining liver capacity through balanced energy and fibre intake is essential for metabolism and immune function during the transition.

4. Condition scoring systems

- Various techniques, including visual scoring, weighing, 2D/3D image sensor technology, and ultrasound scanning, can help assess cow condition.
- Regular scoring, particularly in late lactation, pre-dry-off, and pre-calving, is important for informed management decisions.

5. Nutritional strategies for achieving dry period goals

- Ensuring the right energy, protein, fibre, and mineral levels is crucial for fat and protein storage, as well as for rumen and liver recovery.
- Managing the type of fat (subcutaneous vs. visceral) is essential for metabolic health post-calving. High levels of visceral fat can lead to issues like ketosis and fatty liver.

6. Key nutritional considerations

- Energy content, availability, and feed quality influence fat storage. High fermentation rate feeds may increase visceral fat, which is linked to metabolic diseases.
- Protein levels must be between 12-14% crude protein (CP), with attention to amino acid balance for optimal milk secretory cell turnover and liver function.
- Calcium and phosphorus must be replenished if stores are low, as these minerals are critical for post-calving health and reproduction.

7. Summary of best practices

- No more than 0.25-0.5 BCS should be gained during the dry period to ensure proper fat distribution and avoid metabolic risks.
- Automated body condition scoring systems offer great potential for precision management.
- Effective dry period management helps improve milk production, reproductive success, and reduces condition loss post-calving.

For more details, watch the webinar or download the slide deck.