

Beef cow pregnancy testing - aim for 95%

Written by Hamish Pike - Courtesy of Totally Vets (Manawatu)

When the pregnancy-testing results don't go to plan, have you asked yourself why?

There are a whole lot of reasons for cows not getting in calf such as nutrition; body-condition score (BCS) at mating; abortion; disease; and deficiency e.g. copper and selenium. Don't just blame the bull. Also, \$\$\$\$ are to be made by not only having less empty cows, but also increasing the rate at which they get in calf.

There are two ways to improve herd fertility:

1. Increase the oestrous activity of the cows

The aim should be to have 90% of your heifers and cows calving in the first 6 weeks of calving. Heifers should be mated at an average of 270kg at 15 months of age. It's a good idea to mate heifers for 42 days only. However, if longer than this, earlier pregnancy-testing can be undertaken (6 weeks after bull out) to identify the heifers calving in the first 6 weeks. Only these heifers should be retained for future breeding. The same tactic can be used for cows with an extended mating period (over 63 days). However, instead of culling the late-calving cows, these can be preferentially managed to calve in better condition (BCS 3.5/5) ensuring that they are cycling by the time the bull goes out the following mating.

2. Increase the conception rate

Bulls need to be fertile and also able to do the job. You also need enough of them i.e 1 bull to 25 heifers. All bulls should be fertility-tested each year to detect unsoundness. It's possible to get a 10% lift in conception rate by doing this. Also, ensure when buying bulls that they are BVD antigen (virus) tested. This goes for all breeding bulls on your property. Most studs will already have done this before sale, but it's very important that you check this with the vendor, or your agent. BVD can cause a reduction in pregnancy rate (5-15%), not to mention the other costs associated with this disease such as abortions or poor health.