

## **An easy method to monitor reproduction management in milk herds**

The fertility of cows is decreasing worldwide. It is largely attributed to the continuous selection to achieve higher milk production.

Other factors are bigger herds, so that individual cows will receive less attention, labourers are not accustomed with the normal reproductive cycle of cows, poor heat detection and poor insemination techniques. In spite of these, several producers achieve good results with the reproduction management of their milk herds. Producers will have to give more attention to critical management indicators to prevent a deterioration of reproduction management, since it takes very long to rectify.

Many producers apply the inter-calve period as a reproduction management norm. This figure could be misleading, because it could be based on only a portion of the herd. An inter-calf period of 420 days implies that only 87% of the cows in the herd have given birth within a 12-month period.

The reproduction management in a herd should be monitored on an ongoing basis to notice any deterioration in good time. The fertility of milk cows are measured through three criteria, namely (1) the ability of cows to get on heat shortly after the calf's birth (2) the ability of cows to be conceived with the lowest number of inseminations and (3) the ability to remain conceived until the next calf is born.

The characteristics that describe the first part of the definition, is the period (number of days) from giving birth to first insemination, and whether cows were inseminated for the first time within 80 days after their calves were born. It is represented as a percentage.

The second part of the definition refers to the number of inseminations per conception. It indicates the efficiency of the inseminators. When two inseminations are required for each conception, the insemination efficiency is 50%. This figure must be calculated separately for each inseminator to identify good achievers and poor achievers. Poor inseminators have to be retrained or replaced, while the good inseminators have to be rewarded.

For the third part of the definition the period from the date of birth up to the conception stage (also called "number of days open") is calculated. Then two additional fertility characteristics can be obtained, whether the cows were conceived within 100 or 200 days after the last calf was born. These characteristics are represented as percentages.

If these figures are calculated on a regular basis, e.g. after each monthly pregnancy test, graphs can be drawn up to monitor the progress. Criteria are available to measure a herd. In the current economic climate the producers should work with a goal-oriented plan. They must not delay until the milk production of the herd drops to a very low level, due to the fact that most of the cows would be in their late lactation phase or that there would only be a few heifers on their way.

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