

# Technical Update – DIY AI refresher and Tips for a Successful Breeding Season for Autumn Block Calvers



Information correct as at 12:00pm on 21.10.2021

- For block calving herds target 90%+ 6 week in calf rate
- Set up protocols for DIY AI and stick to them
- Check the AI flask nitrogen levels on a weekly basis
- Look after straws right through the process to get the best success

There is no room for non-cycling cows or repeat breeders in block calving herds. With the mating season fast approaching for autumn calvers we look at some top tips to get them bred effectively. Many of these points will also be relevant to AYR operations.

All cows need to be cycling at the point of the PSM (Planned Start of Mating) or the end of the VWP (Voluntary Waiting Period) for AYR calvers.

Start pre-mating heat detection 28 days prior to this. The aim is to identify all non-cycling cows by 7 days before the PSM so you can treat with a Progesterone device at this stage if required.

Key Performance Indicators	Excellent performance	Good performance	Average performance
Cows and heifers calved within the first 6 weeks (%)	>90%	80%	70%

(from AHDB: Block calving key performance indicators | AHDB)

The 6-week calved rate is the most important parameter in a block calving herd. Recovery time post calving and uterine health needs to be optimal, for every day later on the calving pattern, a cow is 0.5% less likely to get back in calf next time (Dave Gilbert, Horizon Dairy Vets), so the earlier cows calve in the block the better.

## AI refresher points:

When doing your own AI, attention to detail is paramount as even a small mistake can knock the pregnancy rate by a few percent. Here are a few reminders and tips:

- How old is your flask? It is impossible to tell if your tank is damaged by just looking at it.
- Measure the level of liquid nitrogen weekly – if it is losing >1cm per week, there could be a problem with your flask.
- When raising the canister to locate your straw, minimise the time that it is kept above the liquid nitrogen to no more than 5 seconds. If you don't find the correct straw right away, lower the canister back down and wait a few seconds.
- Always use forceps to locate your straw and not your fingers! Your body heat will start defrosting the semen unevenly and this will cause damage to the sperm. Shake/flick straw to avoid explosions.
- Only thaw one straw at a time – once a straw is defrosted, you have only 10 minutes to get it into the cow so defrosting several straws at once is asking for trouble.
- Your water bath or automatic thawing device must be set at 35-37°C (check the temperature manually regularly if you are using an electrical device). For a 0.25ml straw of sexed semen, the minimum thaw time is 40 seconds (60 seconds for a 0.5ml).

- Once the straw has thawed, you can use your fingers to remove it from the water bath – the straw must be dried before you load it into your (warmed) gun as water can damage the sperm once you cut the top off the straw.
- In addition to the plastic sheath, we recommend using a ‘sanitary chemise’ - a disposable plastic sleeve that keeps the gun clean until you enter the opening to the cervix when the sheath is pulled back so that the tip of the gun pops through.
- As well as optimal semen handling; quiet, safe handling of cows is also paramount to a successful service period as stress is so intrinsically linked to fertility performance.

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For further discussion or to help with any questions that you may have, please contact Consultant Support on [consultantsupport@kiteconsulting.com](mailto:consultantsupport@kiteconsulting.com) or 01902 851007 / 07542 403225