

WELCOME

Well, it has finally happened. Article 50 has been triggered and the UK is now heading day by day towards 30th March 2019 when we will officially leave the EU.

This gives just 730 days to successfully negotiate our exit and put in place the arrangements and legislation to allow trade and all other functions to perform effectively. To deliver this will be a considerable achievement but will require significant lobbying from farmers and farming organisations if British Agriculture is to be fairly represented.

At some point in the next two years, the decision makers will have to turn their attention to how much of the funding for agriculture, currently provided by the EU in the form of farm payments and grants, will be replaced. We will watch with interest. In the interim, many grant schemes will continue, offering opportunities for farmers to receive funding in several areas as we outline in this issue of Promar Matters.

Closer to home, one area which will remain unaffected by the Brexit negotiations is the need to continue to drive farm efficiency. We take a look at fertility which still represents the second largest cost of dairy farming. It is an area of management where developing a clear plan, measuring performance and using a professional service such as Genus ABS RMS can have a big impact on profitability, helping prepare the business for whatever comes out of the Brexit talks.



James Dunn
Promar Managing Director

Several grants schemes still open



Sarah Hurford
Promar consultant

Promar consultant Sarah Hurford summarises the current situation on farm grants.

A wide range of grant schemes is currently open to farmers, offering the opportunity to claim funding for a variety of initiatives. Promar consultants are able to help customers confirm eligibility and help with the claims process.

The main schemes currently available are:

Hedgerows and Boundaries – a maximum of £5,000 available to businesses with an ELS agreement in place and covering activities including hedge laying, coppicing, stone-faced bank repairs, stone wall repair and restoration. This scheme close on 28th April.

Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier – open until 30th September, this scheme replaces the ELS and a large variety of options is available. Grants can be claimed for maintenance of traditional buildings, organic land management, seasonal removal of livestock as well as growing undersown cereals, wholecrop and brassica fodder crops and the maintenance of buffer strips. There is no limit to the amount of capital items claimed.

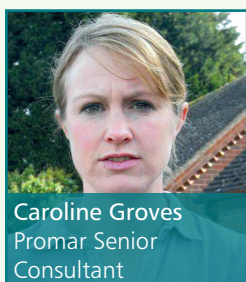
Water Quality Capital Grants – applied for through the Mid Tier scheme and also open until 30th September, with a maximum of £10,000. Numerous items are eligible including larger investment such as roofing livestock yards, silage pits and slurry stores, renewing concrete yarding and installing livestock or machinery tracks. Smaller eligible items include water troughs, underground pipework and rainwater diverters.

LEADER Funding – funds up to 40% of the capital cost of investment in new farm productivity improvements such as robotic milking, slurry separation, GPS technology and pedometer systems such as Genus ABS Breeder Tag. It can also fund farm diversification projects to a similar level. The scheme is administered by local groups with many wanting to have funding allocated by the end of the year.

If you are interested in any of these schemes, talk to your Promar consultant who will be able to help you with initial eligibility and all stages of the process.

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Fertility still a major challenge - but signs of improvement



Promar Senior Consultant Caroline Groves looks at the challenge of improving fertility on farms.

There are good reasons to improve fertility. It continues to represent the second largest cost of dairying after feed. Low levels of fertility result in reduced milk yields, fewer calves to sell and higher costs of breeding costs. To this we can add the cost of carrying a larger number of youngstock and the reduced opportunity to increase the quality of the herd due to a higher proportion of barreners. Finally, youngstock rearing is a major source of CO₂, so improving fertility can actually cut your carbon footprint.

The good news is that farmers appear to be making progress in improving reproductive performance. Graph 1 shows the trend in calving interval since 2000 in milk recorded herds. Since 2009 it has reduced by around 15 days, worth around £7,500 per 100 cows per year. Looking behind the figures the improvement is mainly down to better heat detection (Graph 2) and conception rate is largely unchanged (Graph 3). But there is still room for further improvement.

According to the latest NMR KPI report, the top 25% of herds, which they say is an achievable target for all herds, have a 6% higher conception rate than average, with 41% of cows in calf by 100 days post calving compared to the average of 33% and have a calving interval 14 days below average, worth an extra £7,000 per 100 cows per year.

Driving Improvement

Despite the improvements made, fertility still represents a major opportunity to improve efficiency on farms leading to increased income and reduced costs. Some areas which have contributed to improved performance on farm include:

Adopting meaningful KPIs and setting targets

measurement is key to improvement yet many measures talked about when discussing fertility don't allow prompt management action.

Calving Interval is a good example of a poor measure, being historic and excluding the worst offending animals - those that fail to conceive and so don't have a calving interval at all. KPIs that allow improvements in fertility need to be timely and prompt action when the trend is in the wrong direction or they indicate worsening performance. These would include:

- Heat detection rate – how effectively are bulling cows identified
- 21 day pregnancy rate – the proportion of cows eligible for service who conceive
- 100 day not in calf
- 200 days not in calf

Decide on the best measures and set targets that allow you to track performance.

Heat detection aids

spotting bulling cows is still crucial and many cows are showing reduced signs of heat. Technologies such as pedometers and activity monitors have helped increase accuracy of heat detection.

Total reproduction services

services like Genus ABS RMS which provide a total fertility service consistently achieve excellent pregnancy rates through improved heat detection and superior conception rates.

Teamwork

a focused team approach involving farm staff, AI technicians, the vet and nutritionist sharing common goals can improve performance on farm.

Using data

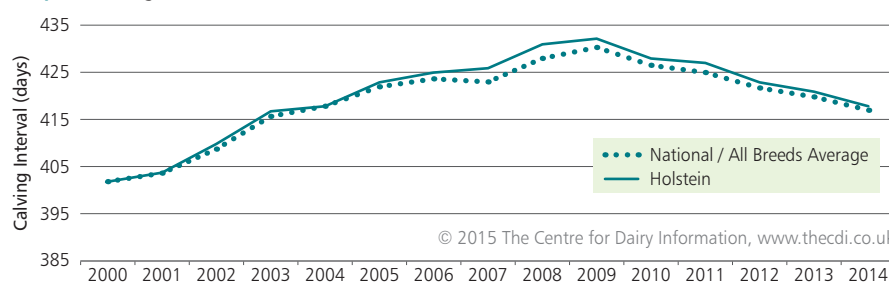
using fertility data to monitor performance and identify trends as a way to target areas for improvement.

High fertility index bulls

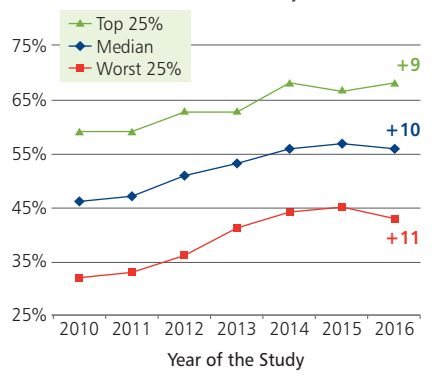
since 2009 it has been possible to select bulls with a high Fertility Index. It is probably no coincidence that reproductive performance has increased since these bulls have been available.

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Graph 1 Calving Interval (Annual trend)



Graph 2 % Served by day 80 after calving (500 NMR Herds - Trends over 7 years)



Graph 3 Conception rate (500 NMR Herds - Trends over 7 years)

