

Northwest Veterinary Associates, Inc.

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Newsletter for December 2006

How are you getting cows bred? What tools do you use to improve pregnancy rates in your herd? These and many more issues were discussed at the first annual meeting of a new organization last week in Denver. The Dairy Cattle Reproduction Council was formed to be a clearinghouse of current information on breeding dairy cattle in the United States. They invited a group of global experts to present the best information they had and I was privileged to listen to them.

As a result of the growing size of the average dairy herd and the significant increases in milk production per cow, the job of finding cows in heat and getting them pregnant becomes quite a challenge. As milk production increases, the intensity and duration of heat is reduced by at least 50%. Research done in recent years shows that cows are in heat for only 7.1 hours and show only 8.5 mounts per heat. Even with a good plan of visual observation, half the heats are missed. They either occur in the middle of the night when no one is around, or they are weak involving little mounting activity. Lamé cows have 70% fewer mounts than cows with sound feet.

Most farms have adopted some version of estrus synchronization protocols to enhance breeding success. Ovsynch is the most common program used and some newly published research has tweaked the timing. By increasing the interval between the prostaglandin (Estrumate or Lutalyse) and the second GnRH (Fertagyl) to 56 hours instead of 48 hours, the pregnancy rates were improved. Cows were inseminated 16 hours after the GnRH injection, as in the original program.

Waiting a few more days before getting aggressive in your breeding program might be a good idea. We generally encourage farms to breed cows for the first time after calving in the 60 - 80 day window. But a new study gives strong evidence that delaying breeding until 80 - 100 days produces better pregnancy rates. Looking at your computer records with your herd veterinarian easily indicates when your herd is most fertile.

The bottom line is that the basic biology of reproduction hasn't changed much. But we have many more tools to aid us in successful reproduction programs.

Prepared by Dr. Steve Wadsworth