

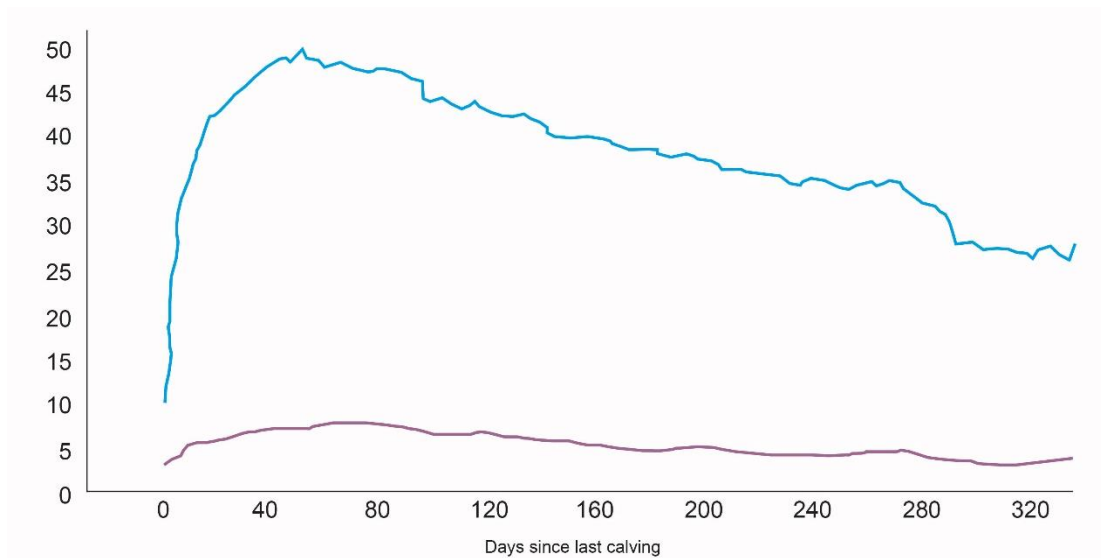


— **First** in the field —

Why fertility is the answer to productivity

With the various challenges the industry has been facing in recent years everyone has been looking at efficiency and cost cutting in all aspects of their farm businesses. Ian Cure from LLM Farm Vets discusses some real on farm successes where the focus has been on fertility as the driver for efficiency and ultimately productivity.

The graph below shows that milk efficiency is at its highest 40-80 days in milk and as such the higher proportion of cows that can be in this range at a given time, the more efficient milk production will be.



(Graph 1 - **Graph showing days in milk vs. yield (blue line) and concentrates fed (purple line) as a herd average.** The larger the gap between the two lines the better the efficiency of milk production.)

Fertility success is measured in many different ways but the one thing that I really focus on is 100 day in calf rate. Increasing the number of animals in calf by 100 days will reduce average days in milk significantly. In order to do this, there must be a real focus on heat detection. The standard cow cycle is 21 days however this can vary from 17-24 days. Using a UK average of three serves per conception (34% conception rate) it will take a minimum of 51-72 days to get the average cow in calf from when you start serving her.

Conception rate harder to manipulate. Over time, focusing on the fertility index in bull proofs will make a difference but in the short term focusing on serving cows from 42 days and making sure that as many serves as possible occur at intervals of 17-24 days should be the priority. If you do this then you will dramatically improve your fertility.

Examples 1 and 2 show two farms that have taken different approaches to heat detection.

EXAMPLE 1

Milking 240 cows with fertility visits every fortnight. Considered their heat detection to be okay but fertility wasn't where they wanted.

Changes:

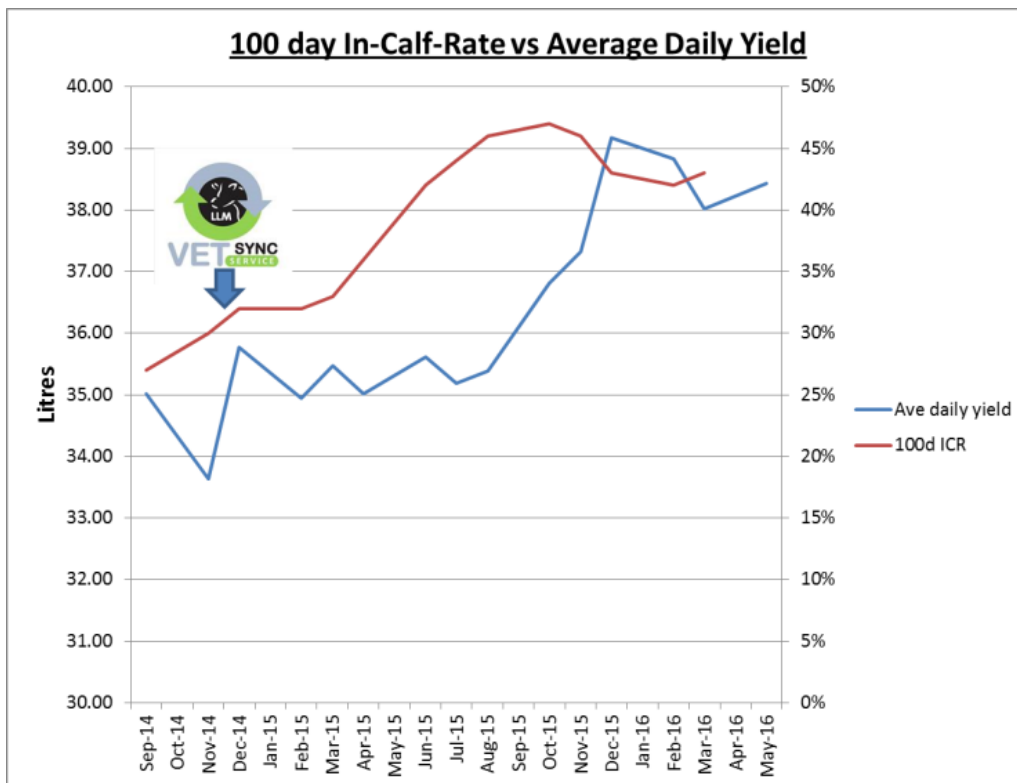
Weekly routines started in Nov. 2014, seeing every cow after six weeks to check they were reproductively healthy. Any issues were dealt with quickly and cows returned to service.

Results:

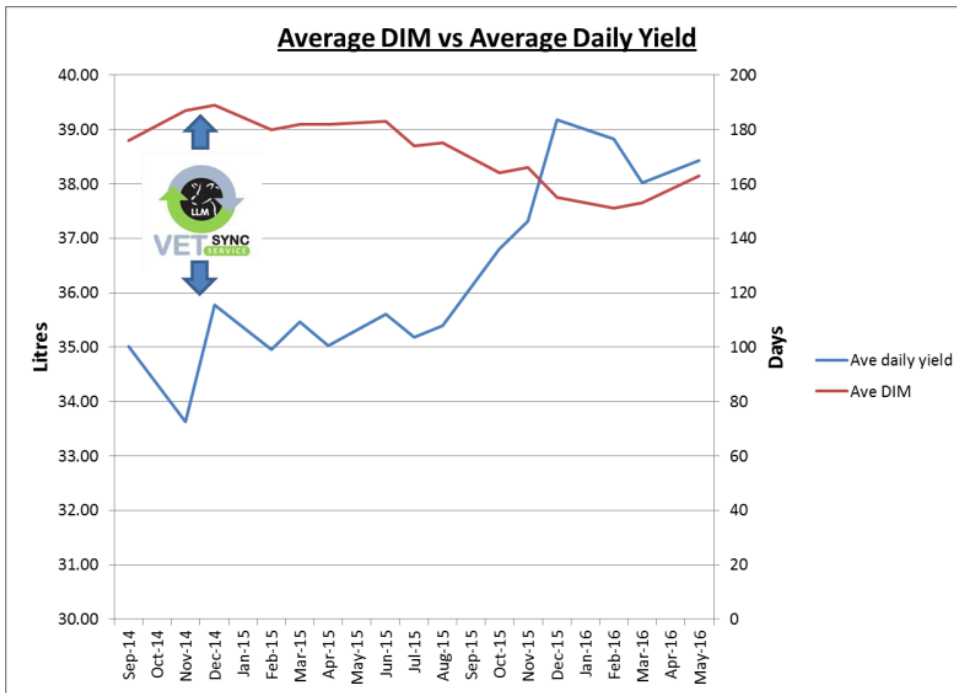
- 100 day in calf rate increased quickly and you can see a time lag of nine months and then a marked yield increase.
- Achieved with a £400 increase in professional fees and £87 increase in fertility medicines.

This system works really well but relies on good handling either utilising head locking yokes or herringbone race. It is often assumed that lots of reproductive drugs are used but this isn't the case, by seeing animals weekly and recording findings on each ovary it is easier to work out where they are in their cycle and prescribe the appropriate course of action.

Graph 2



Graph 3



LLM Farm Vets are committed to progressing dairy, beef and sheep farming with branches in Whitchurch, Eccleshall, Wrexham, Preston, Clitheroe and Bakewell.

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EXAMPLE 2

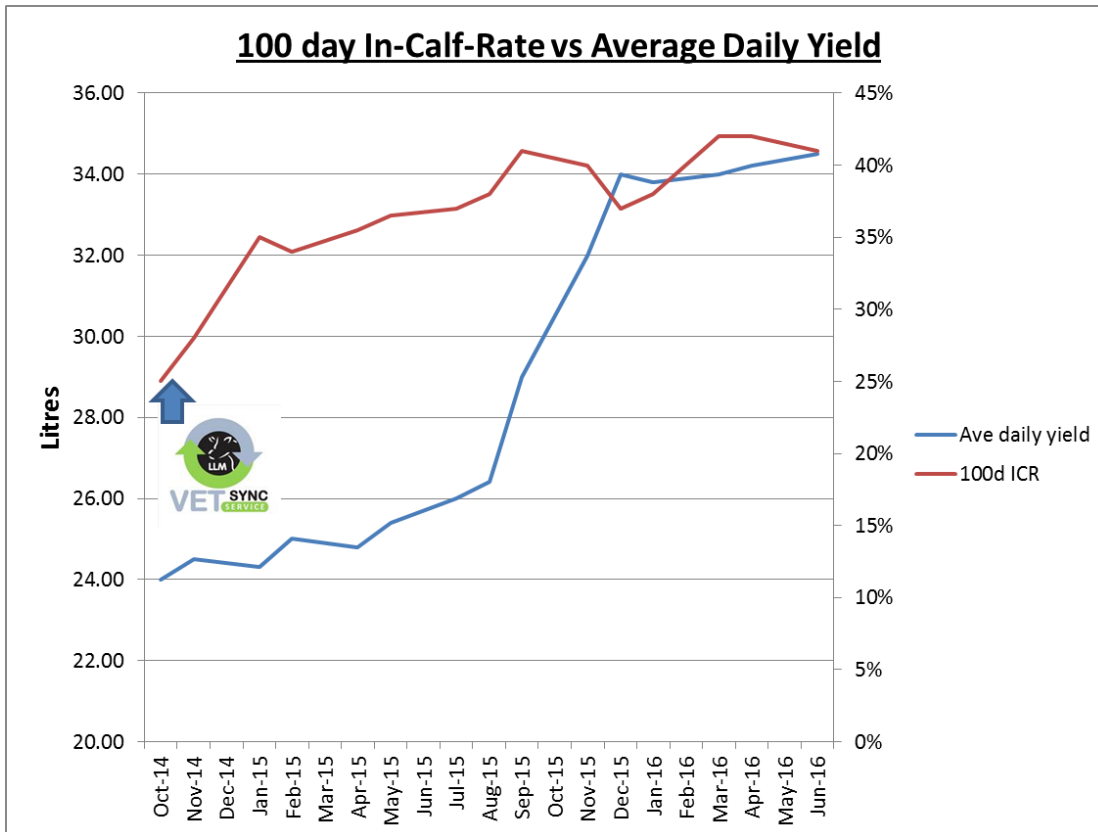
Milking 170 cows using three robots – 2.7 visits avg. Driver is yield – milk/cow/day was 25L with fortnightly fertility visits. They always thought they were okay with fertility as their conception rate was circa 34% and thought the yield issues were all nutrition related.

Changes:

Full focus on heat detection. Initially led by the farmer, then after it proved beneficial, they started to use an AI technician.

Results:

Overall conception rate dropped slightly to 33% but 100 day in calf rate improved dramatically as subsequent yield.



(Graph 4)

So in summary the lower your days in milk, the more milk per cow per day you produce for the same outputs and thus the more productive your farm will be.

Remember it will take a year commitment to really see the benefits of this focus on milk yield or overall

efficiency but if you introduce smaller targets in the meantime like lifting submission rates, then lifting 100 day in calf rates and so on it can help improve morale along the way. We always see routine fertility visits as going to sort the problem cows out. With good heat detection all the PD's should be in calf, what we are actually doing is helping get open cows served. This is where regular fertility visits really pay for themselves but it's a team approach.