

Initiative keeps calf growth on track

XLVets has launched an initiative designed to help dairy producers check that calf growth rates, during the first eight weeks of life, are on track to ensure that they calve down, as heifers, at the target age of between 22 and 24 months old.

Called Calf Tracker, it is based on measuring and monitoring five key performance indicators: growth rate to weaning, total mortality, pneumonia rate, scour rate, and total protein level in the blood.

“To maximise lifetime production, the optimum age for

first calving is between 22 and 24 months. Calculating back, this means that heifer calves need to average growth rates of between 850g and 1kg per day, so that they can be served at between 13 and 15 months old. At this point they need to have reached 60% of their adult bodyweight,” explains Westmorland Veterinary Group’s Kirsty Ranson, who heads up the XLVets steering group on the initiative.

“So a calf’s growth rate in the first eight weeks of life has a massive impact on its future performance.”

She adds that the aim of the initiative is to help producers to accelerate growth rates in young calves: “And to enjoy the benefits of getting heifers in calf sooner. This not only reduces rearing costs, but also means financial returns will be gained sooner.”

Producers can access the initiative through their local XLVets’ vet practice and they will receive a starter pack to support their monitoring activities. This includes a weigh band for measuring calves and a guidance sheet on how to calculate weights.



Kirsty Ranson weigh banding as part of the Calf Tracker system