

Reducing Mortality Rates in Young Calves

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Background

- Littlebourne Farm had struggled with high death rates in young calves
- Typically 1-2 weeks of age
- Mainly the later born calves
- In worst years losses of 25% have occurred

Cause of the Problem?

- Cryptosporidiosis, commonly known as:

“Crypto”



Crypto

- A microscopic parasite of the same group as toxoplasma and malaria
- Infects a wide range of mammals including deer, cattle and humans
- Gastro-intestinal infection in young animals leading to scouring, dehydration and death
- A hardy organism which can survive on pasture for long periods and resistant to some disinfectants

Crypto Risk Factors

- Access to stagnant water such as puddles and wallows
- Later born animals at higher risk as pasture contamination builds up over the calving period
- Stress and other animal health issues which can compromise the immune system



Management Changes Made

- Calving hinds are spread over more paddocks:
→ reduced stock density
- Earlier pregnancy scanning to allow foetal aging:
→ later calving cows calve in their own mob
- No longer take a cut of baleage off part of each calving paddock (have specialist baleage paddocks)
→ less stress, more cover, better lactating cow nutrition
- Improved and complete water scheme:
→ calves no longer drink from puddles

Results

Since making these management changes in 2015 we have had:

- ❖ No calf deaths due to Crypto
- ❖ Negligible young calf deaths in total for last two seasons

