

Most of us don't like to admit that at one time or another we've found ourselves lost and driving in circles. Most wives (especially mine) are often happy to remind us and can promptly recall each and every episode. I try to tell her that driving in circles is not necessarily a "bad thing," look at NASCAR. Those guys get paid a lot of money to drive in circles. She says; "True, but your last name is not Earnhardt and this is not Talladega."

Another good time to be driving in circles is when you are on "the right track" with your reproductive management program. However, before discussing reproductive management programs, it's important to consider the characteristics of a circle.

Like circles, estrous cycles are the result of a repetitive series of hormonal communications between the ovary, the brain, and the uterus that ultimately cause the cow to show estrus every 21 days. Because standing estrus is the only outward visible evidence that estrous "cycles" are

occurring, we have arbitrarily assigned the day of estrus as both the beginning and the end of the estrous cycle. The estrous cycle is but one component of a much larger cycle called the reproductive cycle. The reproductive cycle is the series of events that result in animals repeatedly conceiving and producing a live calf, hopefully, on a twelve to thirteen month interval. The reproductive cycle not only includes the period of estrous cycles, but also gestation, lactation, the dry period, calving and the period of postpartum anestrus.

Flat Tires and Reproductive Management Programs

Sometimes round objects get flat spots that cause them not to function properly. I saw this often in one of my summer jobs as a youth, changing tires in a filling station. The funny thing about flat tires is, no matter where the leak, they always go flat on the bottom. Reproductive management programs are very similar. The "leak" could be anywhere in the management program, but they always go "flat" in the breeding period.

When you find yourself with a nail in a tire, you

immediately begin to speculate as to where you picked it up. Usually the last place you went will take the brunt of the blame. "Must have been when I went over to Farmer John's yesterday; that place is always a dump." However, reality is, that nail has probably been there for quite a while but only recently leaked enough air to cause the tire to go flat. So too with reproductive management programs.

When pregnancy checks aren't so good, we often immediately lay blame to recent events (the heat detector, the inseminator, the synchronization system,

the semen, etc.) however, in reality, we probably picked up the nail long before that.

Let's discuss the primary hazards on the reproductive highway and how to avoid "flats" in your management program.

Fresh Cow Problems

The "fresh cow" segment of the reproductive highway is a pothole filled stretch of road. Cows with postpartum metabolic disorders such as milk fever, ketosis, and displaced abomasums are much less likely to settle early in the breeding period than "normal" cows. Other abnormalities such as



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Milk Fever Increases the Risk of Secondary Health Disorders

Milk Fever increases the risk of

	Increase rate
Dystocia	7.2 Times Greater Risk
Retained Placenta	4.0 Times Greater Risk
Ketosis	23.6 Times Greater Risk
Mastitis	5.4 Times Greater Risk
Metritis	24 Times Greater Risk

Curtis, et al., 1985. JDS 68:2347

retained placenta, difficult calving, metritis, cystic ovaries or poor body condition are also associated with reduced reproductive efficiency.

Early identification and early treatment of fresh cow problems is critical to minimizing economic losses associated with these disorders. This requires intense observation of fresh cows to identify potential problems early while they are still minor. Otherwise, minor problems become major ones before they are identified and major problems can become out right catastrophes before they are treated.

Work with your veterinarian to establish an intense protocol of fresh cow observation, with temperature monitoring for 10 days post calving, and a standard set of operating procedures for therapeutic treatment to nip problems in the bud before they fester into huge economic parasites.

The Dry Period

The dry period is such a serene, quite and apparently uneventful stretch of road that it's hard to believe there could be any problems nearby. The dry cow is often

set on cruise control and forgotten about. However, the road through the dry period has several forks in it. If you get too relaxed and miss your turn, you may find yourself on a very dangerous stretch of road.

Most of our problems with fresh cows are actually due to a missed turn in the dry period or even sooner. Cows that develop one problem are predisposed to other problems, each of which have negative implications for reproduction, as shown in the chart above.

Watch for Road Signs

The alert driver will watch for road signs. One of the most obvious road signs the dairyman can follow is body condition. We know cows will loose weight and body condition after calving, and there is nothing we do to prevent it. Therefore, it's extremely important that cows are in optimum body condition when they calve so they'll have energy reserves to pull from when needed.

We also know we don't want to make any significant changes in body condition (up or down) during the dry-period. Therefore, we must dry cows off in ade-

quate body condition (3.0 to 3.5) and maintain that level until calving. This problem is complicated by the fact that cows will decrease dry matter intake by 20-30 percent in the weeks prior to calving while energy demands from the growing fetus increase exponentially. This means the energy density of the ration must be increased during the 2-3 weeks prior to calving. It's also important to consider the individual cow and not just the herd average. If the herd average is 3.25, about half your cows may be below 3.25 and many may be below 2.5. Finally, since

body condition at dry-off is so critical to dry-cow nutrition and postpartum health, the single most important time for you to evaluate body condition may be at 60 to 90 days prior to dry-off. This gives you time to alter the late-lactation nutrition program if necessary to keep the reproductive management program on a smooth road.

Road Side Assistance

Whether it's a flat tire or a missed turn, sooner or later we all find ourselves needing a little road side assistance. On the real highway, you can always

count on AAA, on the reproductive highway, count on Select Reproductive Solutions™.

Select Reproductive Solutions Specialists are highly trained and experienced staff who are eagerly waiting with a complete Portfolio of Reproductive Solutions™ to get you back on the road.

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