Transition cow problems usually manifest themselves in the month immediately after calving. However, multiple factors can contribute, and many of the important precipitating factors start prior to calving, ie in the dry cow groups.

The Healthy Start Farm Audit is designed to assist farmers and their veterinarians in assessing risks to transition cow health, to help determine whether a ketosis monitoring program is needed. This easy on-farm checklist can also be used to evaluate a herd management system, and track changes to it.

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Healthy Start Checklist
For better management know your herd’s risk

- Housing, including design and comfort
- Cow factors, such as Body Condition Score (BCS), twins and disease
- Nutrition, from feed quality to water access
Housing

Cubicle dimensions (measure from curb to brisker location) 14
- 1.2 - 1.3m wide, 1.7 - 1.8m long
- 1.2 - 1.6 m, 1.7 - 1.8m long
- 1.6 - 1.9m wide, 1.8 - 2.0m long
- 2.0 - 2.2m wide, 1.8 - 2.0m long

Cow comfort
Uncomfortable cubicles or too little bedding area can lead to increased stress, standing and reduced DMI.

Temperature/Ventilation
Heat stress can vary greatly depending on the season and local weather. It is critical that local conditions are monitored and that appropriate ventilation strategies are in place. The primary feeding management decision for dairy farmers is how to balance the need for feeding and providing water with the need to provide ample ventilation to prevent overheating and excessive sweating.

Feeding and feeding management
- The primary feeding management goal during the transition period is to minimise the inevitable drop in DMI that occurs prior to calving. ENFSTAG can be useful to farmers starting a feeding strategy for the transition period.
- A lack of water will reduce DMI.
- Balanced diet with a source of starch and fibre. High bulk but low energy. No evidence of sorting. Fresh feed daily. No restricted access.
- Some evidence of sorting is a sign of fibrous feed over-consumption. Usually not over 10% of cows on the farm are affected, however, if the problem persists, restricted access is needed.

Nutrition & Water

Body condition score (BCS) 15
- BCS 2.5 - 3.0 indicates risk of ketosis compared to BCS 3.0 - 3.5. BCS 3.0 - 3.5 indicates likely risk of ketosis.
- BCS 3.5 - 4.0 indicates likely risk of ketosis.
- BCS 4.0 or higher indicates definite risk of ketosis.

Ketosis monitoring
- Regular monitoring can identify the level of risk from ketosis within the herd. Monitoring can be done using blood (BHB, NEFAs, milk (Keto-Test) or urine (Keto Stix).
- Rumen fill scoring is useful to determine if the cow is consuming feed that is not being digested. Rumen fill scoring is useful for identifying possible feeding and health issues. How rumen fill scores done routinely (at least weekly) for pre-calvers?

Displacement/Dislocation
- Displaced abomasum 20
- In fresh cows, first 30 days of lactation
- 5 - 10% of cows

Kicking
- Cows are routinely monitored for ketosis. Cows are tested within 3 weeks before and/or after calving.
- Cows are infrequently monitored for ketosis (cows are tested only if they are showing signs of ill health).
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