

Weighing up heat detection options

There are a number of tools and technologies now available to help dairy farmers optimize heat detection.

Article supplied by CRV Ambreed

The general manager of breeding indicator company Estroject, Boyd Dingus, says deciding which combination of heat detection aids to use is a matter of weighing up each tool's effectiveness, its cost versus benefit, and ease of use.

Tail paint

"Tail paint is inexpensive and has been used as a heat detection aid for decades, however, the effectiveness of tail paint can be hit and miss as it is never applied in a consistent way," Dingus says.

"Two people could go out and apply tail paint, and you'd likely get two completely different results. One person could apply a short strip, the other long. One person could do a very thick strip, while the other does skinny. Cow to cow and person to person, every strip will look different."

According to Dingus, this inconsistency can become a big problem when the person reading the tail paint must make a breeding decision – especially if they didn't apply the paint to start with. How much paint was there initially? How much has been rubbed off? Should the cow be bred or not?

"Some cows will be bred that shouldn't be, causing you to overspend on semen, and some cows that should be bred won't be, causing missed pregnancy opportunity."

Electronic Heat Detectors

There are a number of electronic heat detectors on the market either as cameras or meters that measure activity.

The cameras or RFID (radio frequency identification) pick up heat from heat mount detectors and work together with a drafting system in the cow shed to draft out cows for insemination.



Detection: Using a tool which measures estrus activity, like heat mount detectors, will increase chances of pregnancy success in cattle.

Activity monitors are attached to the cow's neck or leg and detect movement. Cows on heat tend to walk more because they are restless, mounting or being mounted by other cows. Day-to-day comparisons of cows' activity can be made to spot any significant increases and therefore heat.

"Before investing in this type of technology, do your research and talk to other farmers about the pros and cons," says Dingus.

"It would be sensible to use another form of heat detection as a back-up in case of a system failure."

Heat Mount Detectors

Heat mount detectors are either pouches activated by the pressure of the cow riding, or scratch-off pads. Dingus says using a heat detector, which measures the intensity of the cow's estrus (heat) activity, is essential.

"The higher the estrus activity is, the higher your chances are for a successful pregnancy.

"Without a measure for estrus activity, it's like blindly throwing darts at a dartboard. Sure, some darts will hit the board and cows will get pregnant, but many won't.

Using a tool that measures estrus activity will increase your chances of pregnancy success."

There are proven tools on the market to increase pregnancy rates. Use of simple technology, like a breeding Indicator, helps overcome some of the key downfalls of heat detection aids like tail paint.

A breeding indicator is a self-adhesive

patch that you apply halfway between the hip and tailhead of a cow's back.

As mounting activity occurs, the indicator's surface ink is rubbed off by the friction of the mounting and will reveal the indicator colour.

"There's no inconsistency," says Dingus.

"The sticker is always the same size and shape, so there's no guessing what was there to start with. There's no variation by cow or person applying.

"At the end of the day, make sure you do your homework and find a combination of heat detection aids that allows you and your farm staff to make a 'yes' or 'no' decision quickly."

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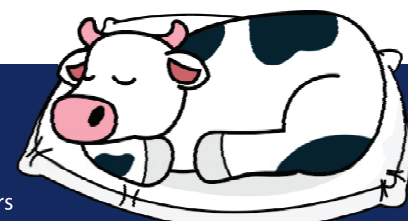
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