



FranklinVets

# Reproduction UPDATE

JUNE 2026



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**DR GREG LINDSAY**  
BVSc  
Farm Vet & Regional  
Manager, Kopu

## Scanning Summary

Over the past decade, national and regional herd reproductive performance has seen steady improvement, with encouraging gains in both 6-week in-calf rates and reductions in not in-calf (empty) rates. These long-term trends reflect consistent progress in herd management, nutrition, and reproductive focus. While seasonal variation remains, the overall trajectory is positive, with cows getting back in calf earlier and fewer animals being carried through as empties.

However, the most recent season has reminded us just how sensitive herd reproductive performance is, particularly to environmental conditions. Across much of the North Island, 6-week in-calf rates

eased back slightly, while not-in-calf rates edged higher compared to the strong performance seen in the previous season. One positive, however, is that the North Waikato/Auckland region has seen the gap in performance shrink in recent years compared to national averages.

The primary driver of poorer performances this year appears to have been a challenging pre-mating period. High rainfall, coupled with difficulty controlling pasture cover, resulted in a decline in pasture quality during a critical window. As a result, many herds experienced reduced nutritional intake at a key time, affecting post-calving recovery. Cows took longer to

resume normal reproductive function, with more prolonged anoestrous periods and lower pre-mating cycling rates.

Once early cycling is compromised, the downstream effects are difficult to avoid. Lower submission rates at the start of mating, reduced conception rates, and an increase in the number of non-cycling cows requiring intervention were all commonly reported. While treatment programmes helped recover some performance, they often worked against the biological lag established earlier in the season.

Discussion at the recent East Dairy Dinner reinforced a clear message for the year ahead: reproductive success is largely

determined before mating begins. The focus needs to be firmly on preparing cows well for calving and supporting rapid recovery afterwards. Achieving target body condition scores, addressing mineral status, and managing transition feeding are critical starting points. Post-calving strategies such as strong feed planning, once-a-day milking in early lactation, rumination monitoring, and the use of tools like Eprinex pour-on and Multimin can all help accelerate recovery.

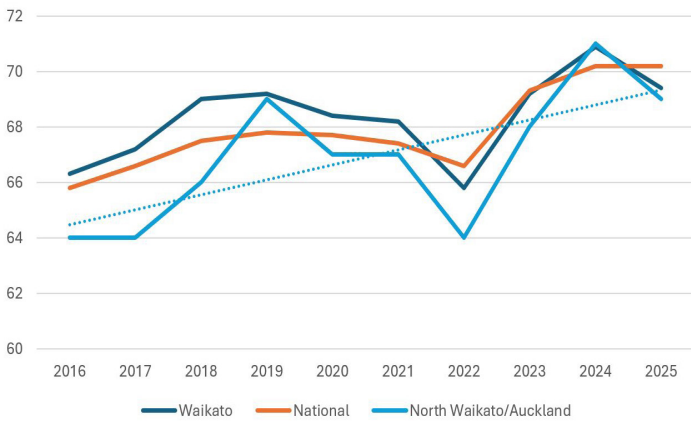
Ultimately, the season has served as a timely reminder that while the industry is moving forward, maintaining gains depends on getting the fundamentals right early.

SEE GRAPHS OVER PAGE

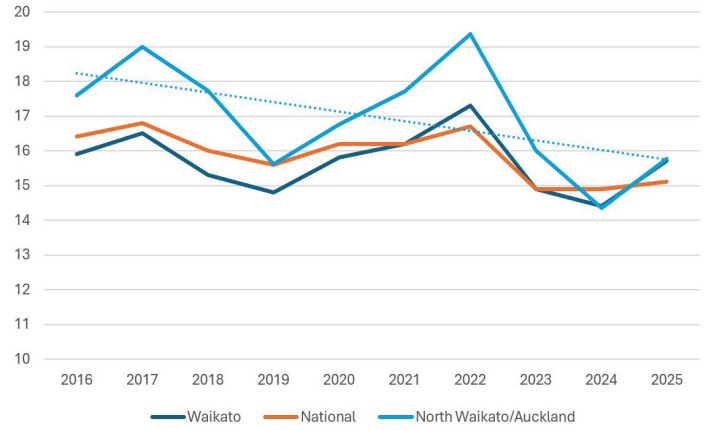




### 6 week In-Calf Rate %



### Not In-Calf Rate %



# Managing minerals for reproductive success



**DR NEIL MURRAY**  
BVSc  
Farm Vet, Paeroa

With calving on the horizon, now is a great time to assess the herd's mineral status. This is particularly important at this time of year, as copper levels in pasture decrease as the weather cools. Studies have shown that cows supplemented with minerals such as copper and selenium have higher conception rates and reduced incidences of reproductive disorders.

Performing liver biopsies is the most accurate way of assessing mineral stores, especially copper. The liver maintains blood copper levels at a constant level until a clinical deficiency develops. Only then would we detect low copper levels on blood tests. In this instance, we want to check mineral sufficiency, not deficiency.

A liver biopsy is a straightforward, low-risk, surgical procedure that can be performed on farm. Under local anaesthetic, a small

scalpel incision is made between the ribs, which allows the biopsy trocar to be inserted into the liver, and a very small amount of liver tissue is collected. Ideally, 8-10 individuals would be sampled, with a mix of age groups.

Once we have received the results of the liver biopsies, we can design a mineral supplementation program specifically for your herd. Supplementation of cows in the milking herd usually consists of injectable products that rapidly increase mineral levels over a short period.

Injectable copper should not be given within a month of mating, so make sure liver biopsies are performed with enough time to adjust your supplementation regimen if required!

Multimin is another option. Containing Copper, Selenium, Manganese and Zinc,

it is designed to boost trace mineral levels during periods of stress. Studies have shown that cows that received supplementation with Multimin 4 weeks prior to mating had, on average, a 3.3% increase in in-calf rates and got in calf 3.4 days earlier compared to cows that didn't receive supplementation.

Don't forget to also supplement your young stock during this time, as they too often require additional minerals to get them through the winter. This will help keep their growth rate up, assisting them with meeting growth targets.

If you would like to know more about mineral testing or supplementation, please contact your regular Franklin Vets clinic.

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# Managing the Transition Period



**DR DAVID MOORS**  
BVSc (Dist) BSc (Hons)  
MANZCVS Medicine of  
Dairy Cattle, Farm Vet  
& Branch Manager

Ask people what the most important part of a season is, and they are likely to say either mating or peak production. In reality, both are important, but achieving the best results in either area requires the herd to be well managed through the transition period.

**Transition can be thought of as the 3 weeks before and the 3 weeks post calving, but it helps me to think of this period in sections:**

- **Dry cows** – over 3 weeks from calving; by the end of this period, cows should be at target condition (5 for cows and 5.5 for heifers).
- **Late dry cows/springing mob** – 1-3 weeks before calving (ideally 10-14 days before calving)
- **Fresh cow** – 24 hours post calving
- **Colostrum period** – day 2-4 post calving
- **Early lactation** – first 3-4 weeks of lactation

There are many variables leading up to and into mating that you cannot control (such as the weather, as we saw this season), but we can control much of what happens beforehand and try to stack the deck in our favour.

**Animals at target BCS calve earlier and have higher 1st-service conception rates.**

Hitting BCS is rarely achieved by feeding high-energy diets over a fixed 60-day dry period; targets are hit by drying cows off based on calving date and body condition scoring. Planning for this starts in Feb/Mar, so if you aren't happy with cow condition, ask your vet about a dry-off plan for the coming season.

**Each 15-minute increase in daily rumination in the week pre-calving increases the chance of pregnancy by 4%.**

Springing cows should be fed to reduce clinical disease and maximise rumen fill / rumination time. Making a transition plan is essential and often requires striking a balance: e.g., DCAD diets used to reduce milk fever can taste bitter and may reduce feed intake, but milk fever has a profound impact on reproduction. Speak to your vet or find more information about transition planning. <https://www.franklinvets.co.nz/blog/getting-the-transition-period-right>

**The 24 hours post-calving are where we see most clinical issues;**

We often talk about the importance of getting colostrum into calves within 8-12 hours after birth. I like to think we need to get the colostrum diet into fresh-calved cows within the same timeframe. You can have the best springer diet in the world, but if cows are waiting 20 hours to get calcium and higher energy feed, they are going to have worse reproductive outcomes than those who get early access to it.

**Once-a-day milking helps cows return to normal rumination time more quickly.**

While most people switched to OAD colostrum cows for time management, it also has the added benefit of helping animals return to normal rumination rates more quickly post-calving, with higher post-calving intakes associated with earlier ovulation and better reproductive outcomes. To me, this seems like a no-brainer.

**Animals with a body condition score of 3.5 at the start of mating have a 5 to 11% lower 6-week in-calf rate and 4-7% higher empty rate.**

Calving at the target body condition score (BCS) and managing post-calving loss to less than 1 BCS are crucial to achieving reproductive success. Working with your vet or nutritionist to ensure the diet will support this is critical, but also remember that factors such as training heifers on feedpads and/or in-shed meal systems, splitting herds so young, less dominant animals get a fair crack or

holding up the first few rows of cows before sending them back to the paddock might help level the playing field.

Transition planning is complex, and this is an extremely brief overview of how one part flows into the next and how each part is linked to your reproductive performance. If you want to learn more or understand how we might help manage this on your farm, please get in touch with your vet or clinic.

There are many moving parts involved in ensuring you enter the mating period in the best possible shape. This often takes 4-5 months of planning and investing time and energy early in the season. Still, if we get this right, it should not only pay off later on with reduced direct costs (think metricures, for example) but also help deliver strong reproductive performance.

## Spring Calving Open Hours

### TAUPIRI:

Open Saturday 9am – 12pm,  
11th July – 22nd August

### TE KAUWHATA:

Open Saturday, 9am – 12pm,  
18th July – 29th August

### KOPU:

Open Saturday 9am – 12pm,  
4th July – 26th September

### PUKEKOHE & PAPA KURA:

Open all year round, Sat & Sun 9am – 5pm



# BCS Driving Repro Health



**DR NEIL MURRAY**  
BVSc  
Farm Vet, Paeroa

Body condition score (BCS) at calving is one of the most critical drivers of production, reproduction, and animal health in dairy systems. Given the seasonal, compact calving pattern typical of New Zealand dairy farms, ensuring cows calve in optimal condition is essential for achieving tight reproductive performance and maximising milk production in early lactation. Cows are expected to calve, reach peak milk production, and return to mating within a few months. To meet these demands, cows must have sufficient body reserves at calving. Ideally, mature cows should calve at a BCS of 5.0, and first and second-calvers at 5.5. These targets provide enough energy reserves to support the significant metabolic demands of early lactation while minimising the risks associated with excessive condition.

Cows that calve too light (low BCS) are at a significant disadvantage. They typically have lower milk production, reduced peak milk, and struggle to meet energy demands. As a result, these cows experience a more severe negative energy balance, which delays the return of cycling and reduces submission and conception rates during mating. In a system where a compact calving spread is vital, even small delays in cycling can have compounding effects on herd fertility and future calving patterns.

On the other hand, cows that calve too fat have their own issues. Fat cows are more prone to metabolic disorders such as ketosis and fatty liver, which can compromise both health and production. They may also experience calving difficulties and reduced appetite post-calving, limiting dry matter intake at a time

when nutrient demand is at its peak. This can lead to significant condition loss and poor reproductive performance, despite starting in a seemingly favourable position.

Managing BCS is particularly challenging in New Zealand due to seasonal pasture growth patterns and the reliance on grazed feed. Strategic feeding during late lactation and the dry period is crucial to ensure cows either gain or maintain condition as needed. Regular BCS monitoring enables timely management decisions, such as preferentially feeding lighter cows or restricting heavier animals.

The dry period represents a key opportunity to correct body condition. However, it is generally more efficient to manage BCS earlier in lactation than to attempt to recover excessive losses late in the season. Early identification of cows falling behind target condition allows for proactive interventions that are both more effective and more economical.

With appropriate feed, cows can increase their condition by half (0.5) a score per month when dry. However, it becomes increasingly difficult to add condition during late pregnancy. Nutrient demand increases significantly in late gestation. A large proportion of foetal growth occurs in the final trimester, alongside colostrum production, meaning nutrients are directed toward the developing calf rather than condition gain. Additionally, physical intake is limited. As the foetus grows, rumen capacity is reduced, restricting how much feed a cow can consume. Due to these factors, cows are unlikely to gain any condition in the final month of pregnancy. Therefore, it's critical that light cows be dried off early enough in the season to allow sufficient time to gain the necessary condition pre-calving.

We have a range of services to assist with your herd condition, including condition scoring, dry-off guides and nutritional planning. Contact your regular farm vet to discuss where we can help you in any of these areas.

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# Are Your Bulls Ready to Work this Season?



**DR STEPH REID**  
BVSc BSc (Hons)  
Farm Vet, Te Kauwhata

You've invested time and money preparing your cows for mating. But if the bull team isn't up to scratch, that investment takes a hit – more empty cows, a longer calving spread, and fewer days in milk overall.

Bull infertility is easy to overlook because completely infertile bulls are rare. The real risk is the sub-fertile bull – still in the paddock, still working, just not working well enough.

## The Problem With Sub-Fertile Bulls

A bull can look perfectly healthy – good body condition, strong, riding cows – and still be failing at the job. That's what makes sub-fertility dangerous. There's no obvious sign that something is wrong until you're finding empties at scanning. Sperm quality is the part you can't see from the fence. Two bulls can appear identical in the paddock, but under a microscope, their semen tells a very different story.

## What We're Actually Looking At:

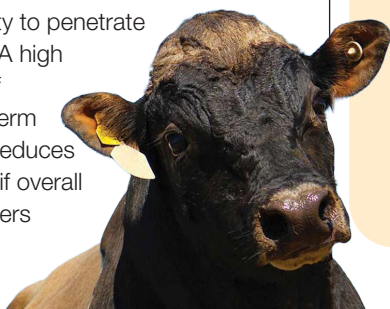
**Semen evaluation comes down to two measures:**

### Motility – can they get there?

We assess what percentage of sperm are swimming progressively forward. Sperm that are immotile, swimming in circles, or moving erratically are unlikely to reach the egg. A bull with poor motility semen may be serving cows normally but achieving very few conceptions.

### Morphology – can they do the job?

Even sperm that swim well need to be structurally normal to fertilise an egg. We look at the percentage with abnormalities – such as misshapen heads, coiled or broken tails, or cytoplasmic droplets. These defects affect the sperm's ability to penetrate and fertilise. A high proportion of abnormal sperm significantly reduces fertility, even if overall sperm numbers look fine.



A bull needs to pass both tests. Good motility with poor morphology – or vice versa – still means reduced fertility in the paddock.

## What Does Fertility Testing Actually Check?

**A bull fertility assessment covers three things:**

- **Physical health** – overall condition, soundness, and ability to physically complete a full mating season
- **Reproductive anatomy** – scrotal circumference measured, accessory glands palpated, penis examined for injury or defects
- **Semen quality** – motility and morphology assessed under a microscope on-farm

## "I'll Just Run More Bulls – Won't That Cover It?"

Not reliably. If the dominant bull in a mob is sub-fertile, you'll end up with one bull doing most of the serving and doing it badly. And if you've spent money synchronising cows or heifers, you need every bull firing from day one – a sub-fertile bull at the front of a synchronised mob can cost you a significant chunk of that investment.

## What Do You Need on the Day?

- A solid crush for safe restraint
- Side access for semen collection and penis examination
- A sheltered area with power for the microscope (we can run off the vet ute if needed).

**Book before the season gets away on you – testing needs to be done with enough lead time to source a replacement bull if one doesn't pass.**

## FARMER TESTIMONIALS

*"We found it a worthwhile exercise – a number of bulls we were initially going to take failed on the day, and in fact the bull we visually thought was the best one was infertile. Facilities designed for bulls, i.e. a sturdy, well-functioning crush, make the job run a lot smoother. The pregnancy rate in our heifers significantly improved last season after using bulls that had been fertility tested compared to previous years."*

**Jason Peacock, Peacock Farming, Miranda**

*"We've been doing it every year for the last 7 or so years. Lease bulls are tested prior to coming on farm. The economics stack up for us; we've had expensive bulls in the past that have turned out to be infertile, so it's a no-brainer for us to test pre-mating."*

**Todd Linkhorn, Waytemore Farms, Ararimu**

*"Highly recommend getting your bulls tested – it is definitely worthwhile. We purchased a stud bull that looked visually excellent but turned out to be sub-fertile. Because he was the dominant bull in the paddock, his low sperm count and high morphology abnormalities severely impacted our heifer conception rates. To make matters worse, the second bull running with him turned out to have no live sperm at all. We only discovered this after a poor scanning result prompted us to test them. Testing is now a non-negotiable for our management toolkit."*

**Tellic Evans, Heritage Hills, Colville**



**DAVE DOUGLAS**  
Sales Development  
Manager

# Increase Milk Production & Repro Performance with EPRINEX

Did you know that EPRINEX is the only lactating dairy cattle product that actually has scientific evidence to show that it increases milk production and reproductive performance when cattle are treated at/or around calving time? This is because EPRINEX is different to other drenches in that it was specifically formulated

for its potency against gut worms in cattle. In fact, several hundred different molecules were tested before EPRINEX was discovered and found to be superior in both potency and food safety – it's the only product with a worldwide nil milk withhold.

Studies in New Zealand, including an independent

2017 study from Massey University, showed that if you treat at calving, you'd expect, on average, 8.22 kgMS/cow/lactation extra over 274 days in milk. No other product can show data even close to this. Cydectin® (Zoetis, New Zealand) has one study from 1998 (although not published in peer-reviewed scientific journals) showing an average increase of only 4.26 kgMS per cow treated per lactation.

You may well think that adult cattle don't actually have worms, and you'd be right. So why do we see a productive benefit when we treat with EPRINEX? The reason that adult cattle carry a very low worm burden is that their immune system prevents the parasite from establishing itself

in the abomasum (stomach) in the first place. The larvae from the pasture are still eaten, so the immune system has to stop them from becoming adults. It's this immune response to the parasite larvae in the stomach that lowers the cow's appetite. The gut tells the brain that it's full, and the cow spends more time lying and idling and less time eating (almost an hour a day). If you treat with a potent drug such as EPRINEX, appetite can be significantly increased, leading to longer grazing time and greater food intake.

If you're looking to drench your cattle to boost milk production, we suggest using a product proven to achieve what you are trying to do, with the added benefit of excellent food safety.



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