

HEIFER MATING MANAGEMENT:

This is probably the area that gets the least amount of attention due to the fact that most heifers are away at grazing. Two seasons ago some trial work was done to identify the best synchrony programme for heifers following the ban of ODB. As part of the study, blood tests were taken to measure hormone levels in heifers as an indicator of cycling. The surprise finding was that 40% of heifers were “pre-pubertal” i.e. not cycling at the start of mating. This may have been related to the drought and heifers being in lower body condition than normal. Be aware that the green drought last autumn has meant that there are a number of heifer mobs that are behind weight targets. So what can you do? The first thing is to weigh the heifers: Target bodyweights for heifers at mating should be around;

Friesians	320 kg
Cross bred	290 kg
Jersey	260 kg

If there are a number of heifers below target weight, then consider implementing a feeding strategy to get weights up early in the mating period. The consequences of not having well grown, early calving heifers is illustrated in the diagram below. Another helpful tool is to apply heat detectors to heifers to allow checking of submission rates during the early mating period. Another option is synchronising your heifers. This will give you a better result compared with treating anoestrus cows. The 21-day pregnancy rate for synchronised heifers in a local trial was 76%, compare this with anoestrus cows that get around 45%.

