

Calf management extension programme to improve calf welfare on British dairy farms*Jenny Gibbons and Andrew Dodd**AHDB Dairy, United Kingdom; jenny.gibbons@ahdb.org.uk*

Studies on commercial British farms inform us that between 5.22% and 8% of heifer and bull calves are either stillborn or die within the first 24 h. A further 14% of heifers born alive and tagged do not calve down for the first time and enter the milking herd. Youngstock are the future dairy producers and it is paramount that they get the best possible start to life in terms of nutrition, health and welfare. In 2016, a calf management extension programme (Calf to Calving) of resources, tools and training for both dairy farmers and their advisers was rolled out in Britain. The objective of calf to calving is to enable dairy farmers to make measured improvements in youngstock survival and growth rate and increase the percentage of high quality heifer calves making it into the milking herd by 24 months of age. The programme involves 12 farms monitoring survival and growth rate of ten heifer calves from birth through to first calving and hosting quarterly open meetings on their farm. Calf to calving facilitates farmer to farmer learning so farmers are better able to assess calf performance, identify areas for improvement, determine their options for change and implement their chosen changes. In addition, best practice messages and the latest science on calf rearing is delivered by technical experts and veterinarians. In the first year of the programme, 43 meetings were delivered with an average of 25 attendees, 93% of which intend to make changes on farm as a result of attending a meeting. An overview of the findings and a perspective on the impact of the extension programme on calf management and welfare will be shared and discussed.