

ZERO EVENTS LEAD TO REPRO SUCCESS

Article by Ben Voelz, US Alta Premier Account Manager

Creating a pregnancy requires your keen attention to animal health and welfare through a cow's entire lactation. The road to creating a pregnancy begins long before you actually inseminate the cow. It begins before you enroll a cow on a synchronization program or start monitoring heats using an activity system. In fact, successfully creating a pregnancy starts before a cow even enters the maternity pen.



IT STARTS BEFORE CALVING

It's no secret that transition, fresh cow, and overall herd health all play key roles in a cow's capacity to be a profitable member of your herd. Only the cows that receive proper care and nutrition throughout their transition period and at calving have the chance to become the next **4-EVENT COWS** of your herd. A **4-EVENT COW** is one that records just four major events in her lactation: **1-FRESH, 2-BRED, 3-CONFIRMED PREGNANT, and 4-DRY.**

Of course, maintenance events like pen moves, foot trims, vaccinations, and pregnancy re-checks also occur during a cow's lactation. But when **FRESH, BRED, PREG, & DRY** are the only four major events in a cow's lactation, chances are, she's a profitable part of your herd.

In this case, we'll look closer at the first three events, **FRESH, BRED & PREG.** You'll see that getting a cow off to the right start after she freshens truly affects her ability to cruise on through those first three major events with no issues.

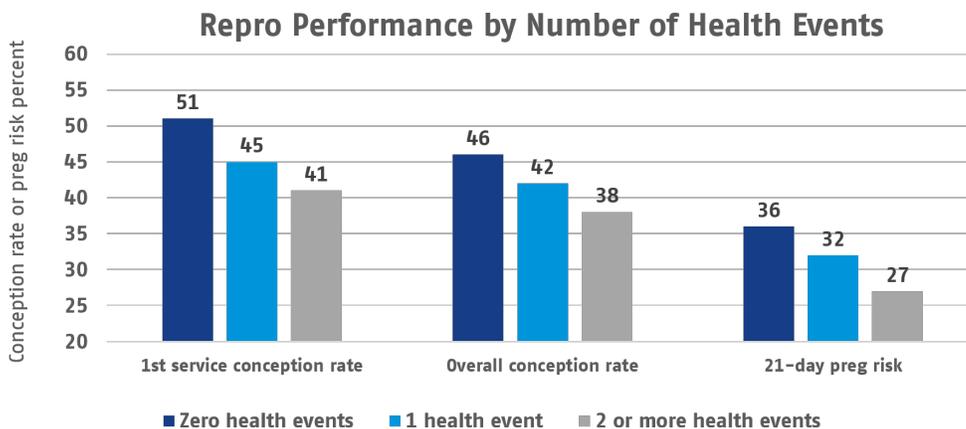
NUMBERS DON'T LIE

We know that a cow's reproductive efficiency is impacted by her health and welfare in the transition and fresh cow periods. We wanted to know to what extent. So, we did our research.

We dug into the herd health and reproduction records on 10,000 cows from three different dairies throughout the US. These herds operate at a very high level of management and keep accurately detailed records on all health events in their herds.

We sorted the cows from the three dairies into three different groups. We assigned each cow to a group based on the number of detrimental health event setbacks she had – zero, one, or more than one. By detrimental health events, we mean the ones that cost time, labor and money – including fresh cow events like milk fever, retained placenta, metritis, DA, ketosis, and also mastitis.

We then analyzed first service conception rate, overall conception rate and 21-day pregnancy risk per group. This chart illustrates what we found.



FEWER EVENTS EQUALS SUPERIOR REPRO

It's easy to see the trend. Cows with zero health events have higher repro performance than cows with one and two or more health events.

It's also important to note that more than 76% of these events happened in the first 30 days in milk. That emphasizes the importance that an animal's health and welfare throughout her transition and fresh cow periods plays on her ability to become a profitable **4-EVENT COW**. Cows that get the best start to their lactation, before and after calving are much more likely to be **BRED** on time and **CONFIRMED PREGNANT** after just one service.

The cows that had healthy, trouble-free transition and fresh cow periods went on to have 6% higher first service conception rates than cows with just one health event, and 10% higher first service conception rates than cows with two or more health events. That proves the obvious – that cows not experiencing detrimental health events, especially in the first 30 days of their lactation, are more likely to get bred back sooner.

What changes are you willing to make to get a 10% jump in first service conception rate?

FOR THE SKEPTICS

You might be thinking that even a 41% first service conception rate and a 21-day pregnancy risk of 27% in the group of cows with multiple health events is still quite impressive. Those numbers come from the high management level at which all these herds operate.

It's more important to recognize the difference in repro performance between the multi-event cows, and the healthy, trouble-free cows with zero events. A 10% conception rate difference and a 9% pregnancy risk difference is huge!

To take it one step further, we calculate the average annual 21-day preg risk across all three herds at 32%. That means the group of cows with multiple detrimental health events falls 5% short on repro performance as compared to just the average.

WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH THIS INFO?

Creating a pregnancy starts long before you inseminate the cow. If your repro performance is not hitting your goal, then work with a trusted advisor to analyze your herd's transition and fresh cow health.

If you have too many cases of those fresh cow illnesses, they cost more than the time, labor and money you're putting in to treat them. They're impacting your herd's overall reproductive efficiency.

Put a plan in place to address areas of opportunity in the transition and fresh cow pens to see benefits that extend to your reproductive success. When fresh cow health and welfare are front of mind, you'll create more of those 4-event cows that 1-freshen with no troubles, 2-are bred just once, 3-are confirmed pregnant after just one service, and 4-go dry with no other health issues.