

Getting the best results from sexed semen

Sexed semen, when used to best effect on farm, will deliver more heifer replacements early in the mating period. By using frozen sexed semen, there is an added benefit of targeting the best cows in your herd – which will deliver accelerated genetic gain.

The following are some tips to get the best out of sexed semen.



Cow selection

- Start with a list of the top 25 percent of cows (influenced by your breeding goals).
- Identify cows that calve in the first three weeks. These animals, if managed well, will have a greater chance of getting in-calf.
- Select younger cows. Fertility generally declines after 8 years.
- Choose well-conditioned cows of at least BCS 5.5 for heifers and 5 for cows at calving, with 0.5 - 1 condition score loss maximum by mating.
- Healthy cows – remove any cows that have had a difficult calving or health conditions.
- Cycling cows – cows must have had their first (silent) heat during the pre-mating period to ensure that they reach at least their second heat by mating.

Top tips:

Select more cows than you need. For example, if you are using 100 sexed straws, identify 125 cows. This ensures you have options on the day.

Use your sexed semen in the first three weeks of mating and conventional or beef semen should be used for any animals that return.



Targeting yearling heifers

Farmers have started using sexed semen as part of an insemination programme for yearling heifers. This is common practice overseas and is a great way to breed 'the best from the best'.

This group needs careful management as yearling heifers start cycling once they have hit a target weight, which is calculated at 60% of your average cow mature liveweight. Some breeds are therefore, later maturing.

- Weigh yearling heifers 4-6 weeks before mating.
- Ensure animals are on a rising plane of nutrition heading into mating.
- Consider targeting your top 25%, based on genetic merit information.
- As with cows, the best results will be seen with yearlings who are inseminated at their second (or later) heat, rather than on their first heat.
- Ensure preventative health treatments such as vaccination, drenching and trace element supplementation are up to date.
- Synchrony programmes – a range of synchrony programmes are available for yearlings. Talk to your vet about options.



Heat detection

Sexed semen has a shorter life inside the reproductive tract – so timing of insemination is everything.

It all starts with pre-mating heat detection, to determine which animals have had one or more heats in the pre-mating period.

Pre-mating heat detection should begin 5 weeks (35 days) before the planned start of mating.

- Ensure heat detection aids are correctly applied and are working well.
- For aids that require topping up (such as tail paint), try to ensure that the same person is responsible for this.
- Monitor cows regularly and record pre-mating heats into your herd recording software.
- Ensure everybody on farm is educated on how to spot a cow on heat, and have a plan to feed this information back to a central point (ideally herd recording software).
- Put someone in charge of the heat detection plan – this is known to deliver a better result.

If you need any help with heat detection planning, especially around sexed semen, speak to your vet, or contact your CRV sales consultant.

Top tips:

CRV's Estroprotect breeding indicator enables easy heat detection due to its friction design and range of bright colours, but it also gives an indication of heat intensity, or strength.

Research has shown that cows who demonstrate stronger heats are more fertile. Order yours today.



On the day

- Ensure target cows are clearly marked to ensure each cow gets the right type of straw – one option is to use different coloured Estroprotects.
- A final decision should be made cow-side as to which straw goes into each cow. For example, if a cow's heat detection aid suggests a weak heat. If in doubt don't inseminate – frozen sexed semen offers flexibility.
- Ensure straw handling practices are top notch. CRV AB technicians are trained to handle frozen sexed semen straws.



For more sexed semen management tips visit crv4all.co.nz.

