

Routine calving induction

Dairy industry commits to complete phase out by 2022

Questions and answers

The dairy industry has set a target phase out date of 1 January 2022, with target maximum cows in a herd to be a routinely induced of 8 per cent in 2019, 6 per cent in 2020 and 5 per cent in 2021.

Background

In 2015, following a series of meetings and consultation with farmers, vets and processors, the dairy industry agreed to phase out routine calving induction* nationally. No timeframe for complete phase out of routine calving induction was set at the time.

Since then limits on the routine use of calving induction have been introduced, and good progress has been achieved in reducing both the number of farmers using calving induction and the proportion of cows within herds being induced.

In 2016, routine calving induction was limited to a maximum of 15 per cent of cows in a herd, unless an exemption was granted either by implementing a herd fertility management plan or by obtaining dispensation for exceptional circumstances.

In the years since, herd-level targets have been reduced to 12 per cent in 2017, 10 per cent in 2018, and 8 per cent in 2019.

After a review of the progress made in reducing calving induction, the dairy industry committed to a complete phase out of routine calving induction by 1 January 2022, with herd-level targets of 6 per cent in 2020 and 5 per cent in 2021.

Progress against these targets will continue to be assessed.

**Routine calving induction is all non-therapeutic inductions*

Q. What are the revised routine calving induction targets until phase out?

- The routine calving induction targets will be:
 - 2019 – 8 per cent of a herd
 - 2020 – 6 per cent of a herd
 - 2021 – 5 per cent of a herd
 - 2022 – 0 per cent of a herd
- Farmers can apply through their veterinarian to the Calving Induction Dispensation Panel to carry out inductions in excess of the annual within herd limit. Exemptions to the target may be granted if a fertility management plan has been implemented or dispensation is granted for exceptional circumstances beyond a farmer's control such as herd health issues, severe weather events (e.g. flood or fire), artificial insemination failure or other unexpected incidents.
- ADIC realises that changes in herd fertility take time so farmers have been given a four year planning horizon to allow them to comply with the revised targets.

Q. What progress has been made in reducing routine calving induction?

- The Australian dairy industry has made significant progress in reducing routine calving induction.

- In 2018, only 9.8 per cent of clients of the major dairy veterinary practices across Victoria and Tasmania practiced calving induction compared, with 13.1 per cent in 2015.
- The median percentage of cows induced within these herds has also fallen from 10.4 per cent in 2015 to 7.09 per cent in 2018.
- The percentage of cows induced nationally (*Dairy Australia Animal Husbandry Survey data – the next survey will occur October 2019)
 - 2012 2.16%
 - 2014 1.30%
 - 2016 0.75%*

Q. Why is the Australian dairy industry phasing out routine calving induction?

- Caring for cows is always a priority for Australian dairy farmers and the broader industry. Farmers are dedicated to providing a high standard of care for animals, and to changing practices when in the best interests of our livestock and to align with community and consumer expectations.
- Following extensive consultation with dairy farmers, industry and veterinary experts, ADF and dairy processors (jointly represented by the ADIC) agreed to a revised policy to phase out routine calving induction through improved herd management practices, tools and technologies.
- All major dairy producing countries have restrictions on the use of calving induction.
- This policy aims to proactively address the issue of calving induction to make sure onerous regulations are not imposed, markets remain open and the industry's reputation is intact.
- The phase out will employ a similar approach to the New Zealand dairy industry, where routine calving induction without exemption has now been banned following a long phase out period.

Q. What is calving induction?

- Calving induction involves treatment of cows with a drug to initiate delivery of the calf before full-term pregnancy.
- Calving induction may be performed for therapeutic purposes when the welfare or survival of the cow or calf is at risk, e.g. due to cow illness or mismatch in the size of cow and calf. This practice is unusual and not subject to the industry policy.
- Routine (or non-therapeutic) calving induction is used as a management tool in seasonal calving herds, to advance the calving dates of pregnant cows in order to achieve a more compact calving pattern. This practice improves pasture utilisation by aligning seasonal growth to peak herd nutritional requirements and avoids culling of late conceiving cows.

Q. What is the current industry policy on calving induction?

“The ADIC does not support routine calving induction and will work to phase it out through improved herd improvement practices, tools and technologies.”

Q. Who is implementing the phase out?

- A Steering Committee, comprising dairy farmers, representatives from the Australian Cattle Veterinarians (ACV), Dairy Australia and the Australian Dairy Products Federation (ADPF), has

been established and is progressing the phase out policy. Farmers, processors and vets are all represented to ensure collaboration and that all sectors' views are taken into account.

- ADF will continue to consult with farmers, veterinarians, state organisations and other stakeholders to ensure that the timing, process and outcomes are right for animals and farmers.

Q. How will routine calving induction be phased out?

- Improving herd fertility is a fundamental to reducing the need for routine calving induction, so adoption of herd fertility management plans with the assistance of a veterinarian or reproduction adviser will be an important measure to support the strategy.
- The dairy industry has been working closely with farmers, vets and reproduction advisers to understand the key issues and ensure practical advice and services are available to assist farmers with fertility management.
- Annual limits on routine calving are being progressively reduced until eventually no routine calving induction is undertaken unless a dispensation is granted for exceptional circumstances beyond the control of the herd manager.
- This approach is similar to the successful New Zealand strategy where routine calving induction was banned six years after the introduction of within herd limits and 12 years after the decision to phase out routine calving induction.

Q. What is being done to help farmers who use routine calving induction?

- Improving herd fertility is a fundamental requirement to reduce the need for routine calving induction and it also delivers many benefits for farm profitability and resilience.
- Getting fertility right is complex and it takes time. Adopting herd fertility management plans with the assistance of a veterinarian or reproduction adviser will be an important measure to support the strategy.
- Dairy Australia invests in research, development and extension to provide up-to-date information and tools for the management of herd reproduction. Together with recent improvements in genetic selection for cow fertility, led by DataGene, these activities have already made a difference in reducing industry reliance on calving induction.
- The InCalf program, training of Repro Right advisers and InCharge workshops for farmers have been refreshed and Dairy Australia will target extension and advice to those farmers most in need.
- Dairy companies will also work with their suppliers to facilitate the implementation of the revised policy for routine calving induction.

Q. How do I apply for dispensation from the industry target?

- Farmers who plan to induce more cows than the target can work with their vets and apply to the Dispensation Panel for an exemption. Applications will require supporting information and a fertility management plan. When there are exceptional circumstances additional information will be required.
 - The Dispensation Panel comprises ADF, ACV and ADPF, with secretariat provided by Dairy Australia.

Applications must be sent via email to the Dispensation Panel (C/- Louise Sundermann, Dairy Australia at louise.sundermann@dairyaustralia.com.au) with the relevant documents attached, two months before planned calving start date, for the review by the panel.

- Veterinarians can access the application form via the moodle portal or from the Dairy Australia website at: www.dairyaustralia.com.au/calvinginduction
- Applications for dispensation should include:
 - The completed application form
 - What actions are being taken to reduce inductions (herd fertility management plan)
 - Plan for the routine induction of dairy cattle.

Q. How does the Dispensation Panel work?

- The panel comprises representatives from ADF, the Australian Cattle Vets and the Australian Dairy Products Federation (ADPF).
- The panel, with support from Dairy Australia, will establish guidelines and consider requests for exemptions exceeding the annual target.
- The Steering Committee will work with the Dispensation Panel to monitor progress and review the target each year in order to establish updated annual targets.

Q. What is a fertility management plan?

- A template for a fertility management plan that covers the key elements as a condition for dispensation has been prepared for veterinarians and reproduction advisers to establish with their clients.
- Fertility management plans will include:
 - An assessment of reproduction performance and the herd fertility goals
 - Current and proposed actions to improve fertility management
 - Consideration of replacement heifers, cow health and transition management, heat detection and AI practices, genetics, bull team and record keeping.

Q. What are examples of exceptional circumstances for dispensation?

- Exceptional circumstances that impact reproductive performance and are beyond the control of the herd manager may include:
 - Failure in artificial breeding
 - Farmer health issues
 - Severe weather, bushfire or natural events
 - Animal health issues
 - Outbreaks of pestivirus (BVD).

Q. What about late calving induction?

- Induction of calving late in gestation (within four to six weeks of the due calving date) provides no overall management benefit for the herd and should not be performed except for the welfare of the cow or her calf.

- Veterinary practices are unwilling to perform late calving inductions, as they provide no reproductive benefit, so early pregnancy testing is required to make sure induction occurs at the correct stage of gestation.

Q. What is the legal status of the phase out of routine calving induction

- Whilst there is no legal requirement to phase out calving induction, the dairy industry is seeking practices that are over and above the legal requirements and is confident that farmers given adequate time and support will be able to comply with the recommended industry targets.
- The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Cattle include an objective that breeding and management practices are appropriate to minimise the risk to the welfare of cattle.

Breeding Management Standards (essential requirements)

- Standard 7.4 – A person in charge must ensure calving induction is done under veterinary advice.
- Standard 7.5 – A person in charge must ensure that induced calves receive adequate colostrum or be humanely killed at the first reasonable opportunity, and before they are 12 hours old.

Q. What if there is a breach of the calving induction policy?

- ADF understands that the policy may have significant implications for a relatively small number of farmers. The industry is committed to supporting these farmers to improve the fertility of their herds and to phase out calving induction for the benefit of the whole industry.
- The ADIC is also confident that farmers understand the need for this policy to be put in place and will strive to meet their dairy company's requirements.
- If a farmer proposes to induce more cows within their herd than the industry target, they must apply for an exemption from the Dispensation Panel.