Abstract by Tracey Pritchard - Recording of health and fertility to reduce costs

To maintain sustainability of farm profit farmers need to optimise the balance between maximum production and minimising costs of production. Reduced dairy herd profitability is associated with health and fertility costs, which are also the leading causes of involuntary culling. Recently advances have been made with the use of farmer recorded data for use in genetic evaluations to improve the functionality of the dairy cow. In the early 2000's UK farmer recorded data related to fertility were assessed for their suitability for use in genetic evaluations which led to the inclusion of the Fertility Index in UK genetic evaluations in August 2006. Following this, records on calving ease were analysed and since 2010 calving ease proofs have been available on sires in the UK. In the past, direct measures for health traits have been excluded in genetic evaluations due to insufficient records and uncertainty in quality and completeness, but the levels of recording year on year have been increasing (e.g. mastitis and lameness), thus future genetic evaluations seem feasible. The improvement of animal health (by genetic or management means) should in turn lead to simultaneous improvement of reproductive performance and consequently, longevity. Of course there is a cost associated with recording but it is becoming a requirement of some milk sale contracts, particularly by retailers whose interest is to differentiate on product quality. The information from recording can help farmers make better management decisions and is a good benchmarking tool, as you can't manage what you don't measure. As important to recording is to review the results regularly, because this is when a herdsperson might be alerted to a problem before it becomes too serious, and to be able to investigate and rectify the root cause. Farmers in the UK have recorded sufficient good quality data to enable the provision of mastitis evaluations that will be incorporated into UK overall index in 2012.