

Students learn importance of young stock management

To make agricultural students aware of the importance of young stock management, the teachers of the Lycée Technique Agricole visited the DAIRYMAN pilot farm Leider for a practice lesson. The students measured the heart girth perimeters of all young stock and established growth curves of the herd by converting the perimeter (cm) into body weight (kg). After analyzing the results they discovered a problem of daily body weight gain during early calf age (see figure). This could be due to diarrhea. Scheduling a next assessment for this age group will clarify whether this sanitary problem is hiding other calf rearing problems.

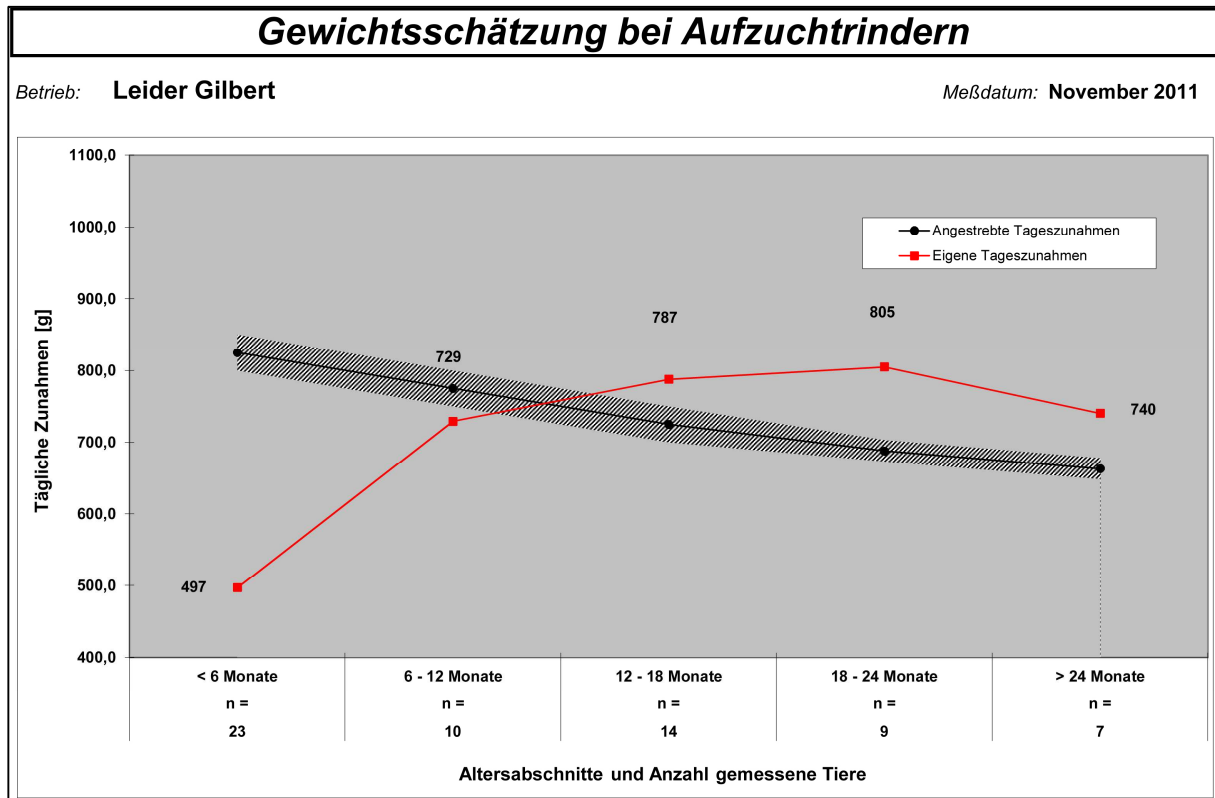


Figure: Daily weight gain (red line) of young stock on pilot farm Leider.

Good young stock and heifer management has been detected as an important factor to improve sustainability in the Luxembourgish DAIRYMAN pilot farms. Reducing the ratio of replacement heifers to milking cows increases the efficiency of the different resources used for milk production. To reduce the young stock, the farmers try to reduce the first calving age of their heifers to 24 months. However, heifers should have an appropriate body weight at first insemination and at first calving. This can be achieved with intensive feeding and high daily weight gain. The first step in the improvement plan is therefore to detect young stock feeding problems by monitoring the growth of replacement heifers. The growth is easily evaluated by heart girth tape method estimating the body weight. A growth curve is established and compared to a standard.



Measuring heart girth perimeter



Processing the collected data in the class room