We often put up many reasons as to why not to calve heifers at 24 months such as if they calve at 2 years they will not calve again at 3 years. The table above doesn’t really support this notion. Heifers that calved at 23-26 months had as good a calving interval and calved down again as a second calver as heifers calving down in the older age categories.

Another reason is that they are harder to calf at a younger age. The figures do show that younger heifers do have slightly higher calf mortality. On the same token heifers irrespective of age will be more difficult to calve and as the figures show will need a high level of assistance at calving. Perhaps this could be reduced if we were more selective in the sires we put on heifers. Even the younger calving heifers are being mated with sires with an average calving difficulty of 4.7%. Interestingly our dairy counterparts try and mate their heifers calving down at two years with sires with a calving difficulty of 2% or less. We may never drop that low on the beef side but should we aim for 4% calving difficulty or less on heifers.

Heifers that calved for the 1st time at 23-26 month had greater survivability in herds with almost 40% reaching 5th parity compared to only 4% of those that calved for the 1st time at 31-35 months.

**KEY POINTS**

- Heifers that are to calf down at two years of age will:
  - Come from the best cows in the herd and be sired by bulls with strong maternal traits.
  - Be born early in the calving season to allow them to be heavier at bulling
  - Need to achieve a daily liveweight gain of 1.1-1.3kg/day up to weaning.
  - Have to be fed to achieve 60-80kg liveweight over the first winter so they will need good quality silage plus 1-2 kg of concentrates.
  - Be turned out early in spring to grass to achieve good weight gain in the run up to bulling
  - Have reached 60% of their mature weight by bulling.
  - Be bred to a known easy calving sire (ideally < 4% calving difficulty)
  - Have achieved 80% of their mature weight at calving.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MATURE COW WEIGHT</th>
<th>WEANING WT</th>
<th>BULLING WT</th>
<th>CALVING WT</th>
<th>TARGET % OF MATURE WT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>600KG</td>
<td>260-280kg</td>
<td>360kg</td>
<td>480kg</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700KG</td>
<td>300-320kg</td>
<td>420kg</td>
<td>560kg</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SAFELY HANDLING ANIMALS**

**UNDERSTANDING WHAT PROMPTS ANIMALS TO MOVE**

**Approaching Animals**

Most animals, like humans, have a comfort zone. The illustration below is specific to cattle but the principles apply generally to other animals as well. A comfort or flight zone can be used to effectively move cattle and other animals. This works best when the handler works at the edge of the flight zone. These zones will vary from animal to animal and can be anywhere from five to twenty-five feet. Deep invasion into the flight zone may cause panic and confusion. Learning the principles of using the flight zone will allow a handler to move the herd safely.

The animal’s “point of balance” is at it’s shoulder. Cattle will move forward if the handler stands behind the point of balance. They will back up if the handler stands in front of the point of balance.

The “flight zone” is the animal’s personal space, and the size of the flight zone is determined by the animal’s wildness or tameness.
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**CARE NEEDED WHEN HANDLING STOCK BULLS**

Bulls are dangerous – but, just how dangerous are they?

Bull attacks account for over 27% of all livestock fatalities on farms.

Only 1 in 20 victims survives a bull attack.

Most bull attacks occur in stockyards or open fields. Bulls have a “pecking order” and may bolt to avoid a more dominant bull. Breeding season is a high-risk time for bull attacks.

**SAFETY TIPS:**

1. Avoid unnecessary exposure to bulls.
2. Work with another person.
3. Be aware of a bull’s position at all times.
4. Know your escape route.

**SEPARATION FROM THE HERD**

May cause anxiety and unpredictable behaviour

**New situations**

May cause anxiety and unpredictable behaviour.

Cattle form a lasting impression of painful or frightening events – may result in future handling problems.

**ILLNESS OR INJURY**

May cause unpredictable behaviour.

- Kick toward injured side.

**CALVING**

Cows can be aggressive when protecting their young.