

Farm First Newsletter January 2018

Milk Fever In recent weeks we have seen an upsurge in cases of milk fever and with some unusual presentations of this common condition. Usually milk fever occurs in dairy cows within 48 hours of calving, but we have seen several cases in beef cows, one of which was several weeks calved and had just come on bulling; there was also a dairy cow which had just given birth to 6-week premature twins and had not been dried off, and a third unusual case in very high-yielding dairy cow 22 days post calving.

The average milk yield for the UK national herd has increased by 30% over the last 25 years, and so the demands of lactation now make it extremely difficult for the dairy cow to maintain blood calcium concentrations around calving. Consequently, milk fever has become an important production disease, with an average annual incidence of 4-9% in the UK, and incidences of 60-70% not unknown. Incidences of milk fever tend to vary with age and breed. Jersey cows, for example, are more susceptible to milk fever. The management and nutrition of the cow during the dry period can have a strong influence on the susceptibility of individual animals to the condition. The word 'fever' is a misnomer, as body temperature during the disease is usually below normal.

The clinical signs of milk fever include:

- Cows that are dull and lethargic
- Ears are cold to the touch
- Stiffness in the legs

In severe cases:

- The cow becomes recumbent
- Has a kink in her neck
- The rumen becomes static
- Faeces tend to bulge in the rectum

These signs are due to the rapid decrease in calcium concentration in the blood which occurs close to calving as some cows are unable to match their rapidly increasing requirements for calcium in milk by absorbing sufficient calcium from their gut or by mobilising calcium from their own skeleton. Milk fever depresses rumen contractility, and other disorders such as retained placenta, metritis, dystocia, displaced abomasum and ketosis are associated with it. Due to these disorders and the effect on the rumen, feed intake can drop and worsen the energy status of the already affected cow.

Prompt treatment of these cases with intravenous calcium salts is usually successful.

Administration of oral calcium in the form of proprietary drenches or boluses helps recovery and prevents relapses.

It has been shown that pre-calving dietary cation-anion balance (DCAB) is strongly correlated to the clinical incidence of milk fever. In practice, we see this clearly demonstrated when cases suddenly start appearing in a herd when a new silage clamp is opened and the only difference between the two forages is the DCAB. Reducing DCAB rather than reducing the calcium content of the pre-calving ration is now considered the method of choice for preventing milk fever. It involves balancing the minerals naturally present in the feeds to create the most favourable, slightly acidic conditions in the blood that promote calcium mobilisation from the bones.

Partial DCAB involves the careful selection of feeds to minimise potash and sodium intakes and the addition of magnesium chloride crystals. Full DCAB uses a commercial mineral supplement containing a balance of anionic salts and additional calcium. For a DCAB ration to be successful, close work with your vet and nutritionist is essential. Contact us Farm First on 01873 840167 or more information.

Rapid BVD Antigen Tests We now have the capability to do in-house tests for BVD virus which give results within a few hours. All we need is a piece of ear tissue taken from the animal using a clean sheep ear-notcher. We anticipate that this will be of most interest to farmers who are buying untested stock into BVD free herds. Within a few hours we will be able to let you know whether it is safe to mix the purchased animals with your own stock. The test costs £4.50/head + VAT. If you are interested in carrying out this test on any stock that you have just bought or that you are about to buy please contact us. We also have some of the ear notchers for sale for £10 + VAT

Free Lab Testing for Sheep Scab APHA are providing free lab testing skin scrape samples from sheep until the end of March. To help you take advantage of this we will examine a group of sheep, take the samples, post them off, report back to you and advise on treatment all for £35 + VAT. If you have any itchy sheep and want a diagnosis before treating please phone us.

Fluke Treatments for Sheep and Cattle The fluke forecast for this year is high risk, so we would recommend that all farms consider checking or treating for liver fluke at this time of year. Many cattle were not housed until December as the weather conditions were so good. If the animals have been in 6-7 weeks and not had a fluke treatment, now is the perfect time to give a dose of Trodax or Closamectin. Adult cattle do not need to be wormed, so a dose of **Trodax** would be the most cost-effective treatment (unless you have problems with skin parasites in the winter in your adult cattle). Young cattle would benefit from both worm and fluke treatments, so **Closamectin** would be a better choice for these and it also has the additional benefit of lice and mite control. This drug can also be used in adults if skin parasites are an issue in winter (nb so can a combination of Trodax and a synthetic pyrethroid pour on –which is about a £1 cheaper per cow and avoids overuse of wormer!) For sheep on farms with no triclabendazole resistance, Endofluke can be used, which is effective against fluke from 2 weeks of age up to adults, so this could be used for ewes which are to be housed for lambing, ideally given 2 weeks after they come in. On other farms, we would recommend Solantel, which is effective against immature fluke from 6 weeks of age. Please contact us for advice on which product to use, we have competitively priced products available for purchase

New Treatment for Eye Infections in Cattle and Sheep We have had some very good reports from farmers who have tried Vetericyn Cut and Skin Care fluid on eye infections in cattle and sheep. We started using this after we read a report of a trial where this fluid had been used on calves with New Forest Eye. It is easy to squirt the fluid into the eye, it is non-irritant and seems to work well. It has the added benefit of reducing antibiotic use on farm.

A January Joke One day a cat dies of natural causes and goes to heaven. There he meets the Lord Himself. The Lord says to the cat, "You lived a good life and if there is any way I can make your stay in Heaven more comfortable, please let Me know."

The cat thinks for a moment and says, "Lord, all my life I have lived with a poor family and had to sleep on a hard wooden floor." The Lord stops the cat and says, "Say no more," and a wonderful fluffy pillow appears.

A few days later, six mice are killed in a tragic farming accident and go to heaven. Again, there is the Lord there to greet them with the same offer. The mice answered, "All of our lives we have been chased. We have had to run from cats, dogs and even women with brooms. Running, running, running; we're tired of running. Do you think we could have roller skates so we don't have to run anymore?" The Lord says, "Say no more," and fits each mouse with beautiful new roller skates.

About a week later the Lord stops by to see the cat and finds him snoozing on the pillow. The Lord gently wakes the cat and asks him, "How are things since you got here?" The cat stretches and yawns and replies, "It is wonderful here. Better than I could have ever expected. And those 'Meals on Wheels' you've been sending by are the best!"