Otter Vets
SIDMOUTH • OTTERY ST MARY

July/August NEWSLETTER!

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Welcome to your Farm Newsletter for July/August of 2022!

In this issue we investigate Mobility Scoring in cattle, which can be vital for uncovering the early signs of lameness in your herd, as well allow for prompt treatment for other issues.

We also look at the clostridial disease known as Blackleg, that can affect both sheep and cattle. The article highlights the importance of vaccination at an early age and what else you can do to ensure it does not take hold in your farm.

Please let us know what you think of these topics and any others you would like us to cover in upcoming newsletters.

Get in touch at sidmouth@ottervets.co.uk.

See you next time,

The team at Otter Vets

In this issue:

Mobility Scoring:

Have you had issues with lameness in your herd before? Mobility Scoring is a great way to keep track of your herd and tackle early signs of lameness with effective treatment.

Blackleg:

This fatal disease can affect both sheep and cattle and usually lay dormant in soil before being ingested by the animal. Find out the early signs and what you can do to protect your farm from it.

Mobility Scoring in Dairy Cattle

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Mobility Scoring in Dairy Cattle – What's the score?

What is mobility scoring and why is it important?

Good mobility and healthy feet are essential for the welfare of dairy cows. Lameness is linked to a decline in feed intake, herd longevity and fertility, as well as affecting staff morale.

Unfortunately, like many animals, cows are good at hiding pain meaning that while it may be easy to spot the very lame cows at the back of the herd, it can be more difficult to detect the early stages of lameness and allow correct action to prevent further deterioration in mobility.

Mobility scoring is essentially a system of grading lame cows based on severity. AHDB has produced a standardised system which allows vets, vet techs and farmers to monitor the mobility of cows over time and help identify lame cows as early as possible. This consistent approach also allows data to be compared between farms enabling benchmarking and target setting.

Lameness can be caused by many factors including disease and physical factors such as hoof shape and horn quality. Common causes of lameness include:

1. The type of floor surface that a cow walks on. This includes poor quality flooring in cattle housing, poor cow tracks, or cows being forced to stand on hard surfaces for prolonged periods of time
2. Ineffective foot trimming. For example, by an inexperienced and/or non-accredited foot trimmer
3. Infection and poor nutrition

Mobility scoring is required by many milk contracts and farm assurance schemes who have recognised the benefits of monitoring mobility to both cattle and farmer.

The AHDB Mobility Scoring System

The standard scoring system allocates each cow a value of 0-3: A score of 0 or 1 indicates a cow that isn't considered lame while a score of 2 or 3 indicates a lame cow.

- **Score 0:** walks with an even weight bearing and rhythm on all four feet, with a flat back. Long, fluid strides are possible
- **Score 1:** steps are uneven (rhythm or weight bearing), or strides shortened. The affected limb or limbs are not immediately identifiable
- **Score 2:** uneven weight bearing on a limb that is immediately identifiable and/or shortened strides (usually with an arch to the centre of the back)
- **Score 3:** shows the signs of score 2 plus unable to walk as fast as a brisk human pace. Cow cannot keep up with the healthy herd. Lame leg easy to identify – limping, may barely stand on lame leg(s) or back arched when standing and walking

(Source: AHDB)

RoMS accredited mobility scorers

Farmers can score cows themselves and there are lots of good resources and templates on the AHDB website. However, it can save valuable time and provide consistency to use an external mobility scorer.

The Register of Mobility Scorers (RoMS) is an independent body which provides accredited training courses in mobility scoring. RoMS accredited scorers all use the same system for mobility scoring which allows for consistent monitoring of lameness over time.

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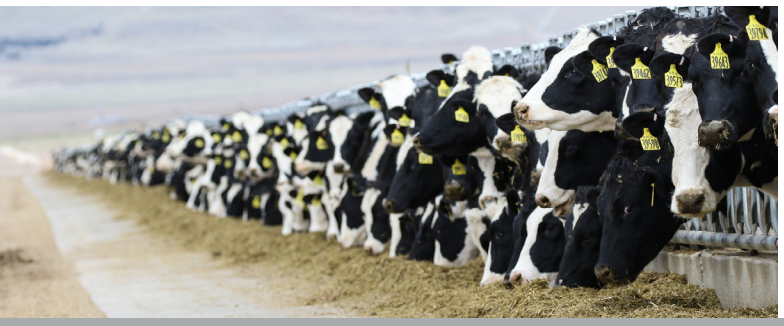
Mobility Scoring in Dairy Cattle

Most farm practices now offer RoMS-accredited vet tech services, which can be a very cost-effective way of consistently scoring cattle and making sure it gets done regularly, as well as making sure the data is properly recorded and passed to your vet. If your vet practice is associated with a foot trimmer, then both the mobility scorer, foot trimmer and vet can work together to target treatment to the right cows.

How often and when should I mobility score my herd?

Scoring cows every 2 weeks will ensure cows are picked up before severe lameness is seen. A good time to do this can be after cows have been milked, on day 1 of a TB test or as the cows walk in to be milked. It is important to have a flat, even surface where cows can take 6-10 uninterrupted steps and that cows are relaxed when walking. Cows should be observed from the side and then walking away from you.

Mobility scoring allows you to produce a list of all the cows that would benefit from treatment, not just the very lame cows at the back of the herd. This can be done before a foot trimmer visit so the right cows are identified to receive prompt treatment, which will improve the success rate of the treatment.



Any lameness should be recorded. Lameness records should ideally include the following information:

- Cow number
- Date
- Lameness score
- Affected limb
- Lesion/disease type
- Treatment(s) given
- Outcome of the treatment

It is advisable to examine all cows who have a mobility score of 2 as soon as possible because this will prevent them from developing into score 3 cows.

Ongoing mobility scoring allows you to monitor success and enables informed decision-making for chronically lame cows. It will also satisfy supermarket contract requirements and show that high welfare is a priority on your farm.

From the point of view of your vet, ongoing mobility scoring enables them to see seasonal trends on your farm and to guide preventative medicine.

In addition to the use of human scorers, new methods for mobility scoring are available through digital cameras that assess a cow's locomotion when exiting the parlour and flag up any cows that need to be picked up and checked for lameness. These may represent a worthwhile investment for larger herds.

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Blackleg – The Danger Lurking in the Soil

Blackleg, also known as black quarter, quarter evil and quarter ill, is a particularly nasty Clostridial disease that affects sheep and cattle. It is a form of gangrene, known as gas gangrene in humans.

The bacteria, Clostridium chauvoei, is the most common cause but it can also be triggered by Clostridium septicum or Clostridium novyi. These bacteria are normally found in the soil and faeces as well as naturally in the animal's intestines.

A Wake-Up Call

The spores of the bacteria can lay dormant in soil indefinitely and 'wake up' when disturbed. This could be due to field drainage work, the soil being dug over, a flood of the area, construction etc.

In cattle, Blackleg is normally caused by ingesting the bacteria. It attacks animals that are normally very healthy, well-fed and young (6 months to 2 years of age). Younger and older animals can also become infected.

Once ingested, the spores are absorbed into the blood stream and then lie dormant in the muscle until agitated.

Muscle trauma such as bruising during bulling or scuffles at a busy feed barrier can give the bacteria the right conditions for the spores to attack the tissue it has been lying dormant in.

In sheep, the bacteria is normally introduced via a wound or a nick, caused by shearing, castration, entry through untreated navels and arguments with pasture-mates, amongst other causes. Once the bacteria has made its way into the bloodstream, it heads for the nearest large muscle mass.

The disease affects large muscles like the legs, diaphragm and heart but can also attack the tongue.

It starts to kill the muscle it has settled in and causes a gas build up that is incredibly painful. Tissue beneath the skin that is diseased can seem to 'crackle' when touched.

The animal may have a fever and severe lameness in the affected limb, which may be swollen and very sore. They might also seem to be out of breath, depressed and off their food with an unwillingness to move. Often, cattle will show no signs at all and only necropsy reveals the cause of death.

Fast Moving and Fatal

Onset is very sudden, and a few animals may be found dead without the symptoms being noticed. By the time they have been noticed, antibiotics are pretty useless against the disease as they need to be given at the very early stages.

Blackleg is an incredibly fast moving disease and is, more often than not, fatal. Once the clinical signs are visible, the animal will normally die within 12-48 hours.

Outbreaks generally happen during the summer when it is hot and humid – the perfect conditions for bacteria. But it can also occur after a sudden cold spell.

Livestock can be vaccinated against Blackleg and this should be done from the age of 3 months. Cows and sheep that are vaccinated a month or so before calving will provide significant protection for their new borns through their colostrum. There are various types available, some that protect against Blackleg only and others that protect against a wide spectrum of Clostridial diseases. Your vet will help you look at which of the vaccines is right for you, your herd and your pocket.

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