

Farm News February 2024

Welcome to the February newsletter



*Welcome to the Farm Newsletter for February 2024! In this issue we investigate Milk Fever in dairy cows, focussing on the main symptoms, lasting effects, treatment and outline the main points of a preventative strategy to ensure it doesn't affect your herd*

## Milk Fever – Prevention & Treatment

Milk fever is a metabolic disorder caused by low blood calcium that can have an effect on dairy cows before and after calving. We investigate the main aspects of the disorder and highlight what you should be looking for to identify, treat, and most importantly, prevent it.



Clinical milk fever (hypocalcaemia) is a metabolic disorder caused by low blood calcium that can affect, on average, 4% – 9% of dairy cows before and after calving. It costs farmers around £ 220

per cow that suffers the condition and can be fatal, even with treatment.

Subclinical milk fever can affect up to 60% of cows in a herd. Signs can be vague and include fertility issues, mastitis, metritis, reduced milk yields and displaced abomasum.

Shortly before giving birth, cows mobilise calcium from their body reserves to supply the increasing demands of their body. They need large amounts of calcium to produce colostrum – calcium levels in colostrum are 8 – 10 times greater than that in the blood supply. Calcium is also required for calf growth, particularly in the last few weeks of pregnancy. Needing this amount of calcium from a standing start puts the body under pressure and calcium levels in the blood can fall dangerously low.

High-yield cows, Channel Island breeds and cows entering their third lactation are more susceptible to milk fever, heifers are rarely affected.



Fat cows are also more susceptible since their feed and calcium intakes are higher and they normally have a high milk yield. It may seem counterintuitive, but feeding a high calcium diet in the two weeks before calving can contribute to milk fever.

### Symptoms of Milk Fever

In most cases, the cow may seem excitable and twitchy. There may be tremors on the skin along the flanks, head and triceps.



This excitability rapidly changes to being dull and the cow may become unable to stand. Quite often they will stagger as if drunk and go down into a sitting position with a “kink” in the neck.

Her heart rate may seem weaker and faster, and her body temperature may drop, especially in cold, wet and windy weather.

Finally, she may lie flat on her side. This is the last stage of symptoms, after which she may suffer from lack of blood flow, slip into a coma and die.

### Lasting Effects

1 in 20 cases of milk fever will be fatal. Cows that have had milk fever before are more susceptible, so much so that 1 in 3 cows that have had it in the past will get it again.

It can also cause infertility, mastitis, metritis and issues with milk yield in the future. For every case of clinical milk fever, there are 3-6 cases of subclinical milk fever.

### Treatment of Milk Fever

Immediate help is needed to correct the cow’s blood calcium levels. As soon as you notice the signs described above, call your vet. They will administer a slow intravenous infusion of calcium that has been warmed to body temperature to prevent a shock to the system.

It is good practice to try and sit the cow up in a sternal position and turn her so she is on the opposite side to the side she was found on. She should be turned every 2 hours to try and combat other complications such as bloat and muscle damage. Ensure that she is protected from weather conditions and has access to water. In severe cases, the vet may suggest removing the calf.

### Strategy

Prevention is better than a cure so, doing everything you can beforehand to prevent milk fever is the best strategy.

- Avoid breeding from cows with a history of milk fever
- Prevent your cows from getting over-fat
- Make sure her diet is sufficient in magnesium >40g per day, in late pregnancy with long fibre included throughout
- Her calcium intake needs to be less than 50g a day during her dry period. That way the cow’s internal system for maintaining calcium will be on full alert and kick in when there is stress.
- Manipulation of dietary cation-anion balance (DCAB) in the dry cow diet is key. Speak to a nutritionist or vet about this.

**Contact the Farm Office on 01889 567200 to speak to your vet and devise the best strategy to make sure your herd doesn’t suffer from milk fever**



## METABOLIC PROFILING

Ewe nutrition is crucial in the run up to lambing. Getting it right is key to producing healthy lambs. Getting it wrong is implicated in poor colostrum production, twin lamb disease, hypocalcaemia, hypothermia in lambs, joint ill, navel ill, watery mouth, liver abscesses, pneumonia and lamb dysentery. Overfeeding is also best avoided, so blood tests are a useful tool in understanding your flock's specific requirements.

There is a well-established practice of blood sampling ewes 3-4 weeks prior to the start of the lambing period. This allows us to identify challenges with enough time left to correct any problems. Earlier than this and the ewes have not yet entered the "high risk" period, so we may miss certain energy-related deficiencies.



We recommend sampling a variety of ewes carrying triplets, twins and single lambs. From each sample taken, we look at beta-hydroxybutyrate (which measures energy), albumin and urea (indicators of long- and short- term protein supply). Based on the results you can then tailor the ration you feed to your animals' needs. If you have specific concerns we can also test for other essential nutrients such as copper, which when in short supply causes poor nerve development involved in swayback – but rapidly causes toxicity when over-supplemented. Arrangements can be made for forage analysis if you wish to match the energy content of your foodstuffs to the ewes' needs.

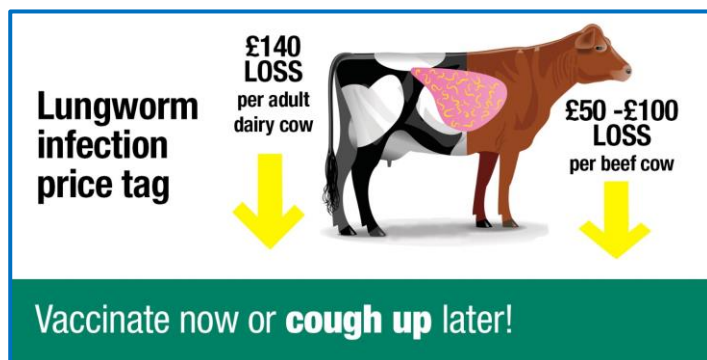
If you'd like to use this service to gain more insight into your ewe's nutritional status and help maximise healthy lamb production, give us a call to book a visit.

## HUSKVAC 2024

Vaccination prior to turnout is a key aspect of holistic prevention in lungworm control (used in conjunction with grazing management and selective anthelmintic use) and is the most predictable method of building herd immunity against lungworm.

The impact of lungworm can be measured in reduced growth rates and decreased lifetime productivity in beef and dairy cattle.

In the milk producing dairy herd significant milk drop can occur. The economic losses for a dairy herd are conservatively estimated at £ 140 per adult cow with lost milk production averaging 4kg/cow/day<sup>1</sup>



In beef cattle, conception rates can be lowered and barren rates increased if the breeding season corresponds with a lungworm outbreak.<sup>2</sup> Loss of condition and milk production in suckler cows will lead to reduced liveweight gain in their growing calves. In severe lungworm outbreaks, growing cattle losses can average at £ 50 - £ 100 per head.<sup>3</sup>

**For details of a special offer of 10% discount on Huskvac contact the Farm Office on 01889 567200**

<sup>1</sup> Crawshaw W & Smith J (2023) Dictyocaulosis in housed five to eight-month-old dairy bred calves. *Veterinary Record* 153-5 149-150

<sup>2</sup> McLeonard C & van Dijk J (2017) Controlling lungworm disease (husk) in dairy cattle. *In Practice* 39(9) 408 – 419



## HAVE YOU HAD MORE THAN 2% ABORTIONS or BARREN EWES

Ewe reproductive failure, neonatal lamb disease and mortality are the 3 biggest factors limiting better flock productivity – with toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion continuing to be significant causes of these unwanted flock issues.



We are offering blood sampling for up to 8 barren ewes between 1<sup>st</sup> February and 30<sup>th</sup> June with a special offer, subject to availability. Samples will be tested for evidence of exposure to enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis, and should be taken from unvaccinated ewes.

Sampling can be carried out at the surgery or on a day when we are in your area. For this, please let us know what day is best for you and we can arrange an appointment.

Blood samples from barren ewes can also be taken at Bakewell Market with prior notice.

**Please contact the Farm Office on 01889 567200 for more information**

## JOANNE O'TOOLE

Jo has joined us and is a qualified ATT (Approved TB Tester). As an ATT, Jo is responsible for undertaking TB tests on cattle. She has previously worked with cattle in a Large Animal practice assisting with TB testing, fertility visits, and clinical work.



Outside of the practice Jo enjoys horse riding and spending time with her 3 Collies.

## LAMBING ESSENTIALS

The lambing season is fast approaching and some of you may already be in full swing. For those of you who haven't started just yet we have got it covered with a bucket containing the **Lambing Season Essentials Kit** with all you need.



## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### MASTERING MEDICINES COURSE

Come and join us for our latest Mastering Medicines Course on 7<sup>th</sup> February at 2pm at the Uttoxeter practice



#### Join us for the Mastering Medicines Course


- ❖ Safely administer veterinary medicines to animals under your care
- ❖ Describe basic differences that exist between different classes of antibiotic and the need for veterinary guidance for their use
- ❖ Describe the basic classes of anthelmintics and the need for veterinary or SQP guidance on their use
- ❖ Store and maintain medicines on farm in accordance with legislation and farm assurance requirements.

To book your place please contact the Farm Office on 01889 567200

### FEBRUARY MEETING


Join us for a joint meeting with Uttoxeter NFU on Infectious Diseases

**GLENTHORNE**  
*Farm Vets*



You are very welcome to join Uttoxeter NFU and the team at Glenthorne Farm Vets to an evening meeting on

### INFECTIOUS DISEASES



Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024 at 7.30pm

Marchington Woodlands Village Hall,  
Tinkers Lane, Marchington, ST14 8PF

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Free to attend                      Refreshments available

Please contact the Farm Office on  
01889 567200  
to book your place

**FOR INFORMATION ON ANY OF THE FEATURES IN THIS ISSUE, OR TO RESERVE A PLACE ON THE MASTERING MEDICINES COURSE OR THE FEBRUARY MEETING, PLEASE CONTACT THE FARM OFFICE ON 01889 567200**

