THREE RIVERS VETERINARY GROUP

FARM ANIMAL PRACTICE

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CATTLE PRACTICE

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Autumn Vaccine Decisions – As the arrival of September marks the beginning of autumn, it is time to start making plans for your housing arrangements. There will be more to follow regarding worm and fluke control etc., but the first item to consider is always pneumonia vaccines. There's a huge range of vaccines available covering a number of pathogens, and the choice is very much farm specific. With the injectable options requiring two doses 3-4 weeks apart, ideally with the second at least 2 weeks before housing, now is the time to discuss this and get the plan started.

Overfat Autumn Calving Suckler Cows

Last year, as a practice, we were called in to assist in more calvings over the autumn period than normal. We were a little surprised thinking the apparent lack of grazing due to the hot dry weather would result in cows in poorer condition. In fact, the majority of cows finished the summer very well fleshed, leading to increased calving issues for these autumn girls.

It looks like this year is heading the same way. Grass growth has been very good in many cases, and therefore cows are, again, likely to be extremely fit leading up to autumn calving. While the immediate effects of calving issues are obvious: more assistance, more chance of stillborn calves etc. the longer term effects on fertility mustn't be overlooked. Cows that have an assisted calving or caesarean will have delayed uterine involution, increased chance of uterine infection, retained placenta, uterine prolapse and extended anoestrus - all of which can reduce the chance of conceiving at the next mating period.

It seems we're not alone in noticing the increased levels of dystocia. We have had information from SAC Consulting – Veterinary Services that their specialist Beef Advisors, On the Hoof, have produced some recommendations to help minimise the risks.

Delay weaning for as long as possible but ensure that every cow is weaned at least 3 weeks before she is due to calve to ensure adequate build-up of colostrum.

Put cows on the **poorest pasture** possible maximising their grazing time and hence their exercise and fitness. This would not be best for the calf at foot so creep feeding may be required.

An alternative option is to **wean cows early**, put their calves on to aftermaths and heavily graze dry cows on poor quality pastures. As a rough guide, stocking rates should be double normal numbers.

With later calvers being the fittest it might be worthwhile splitting the herd and weaning at different times.

Always ensure **sufficient minerals** are available, in particular Magnesium.

Consider housing the fattest cows so that feed intakes can be controlled. The target for a 650kg cow would be around 70MJ ME / day. As well as minerals and vitamins ensure that the ration supplies at least 10% crude protein.

Turn cows and calves back out to grass asap after calving with a high Magnesium mineral available.

Some sound thoughts here. Please remember the advice regarding mineral and protein requirements. If you are looking to restrict intakes, these requirements must still be met.

Fog Fever

Along with the increased levels of dystocia last year, we were also called to more cases of fog fever than in recent times. This, again, seems to be the case so far this year. I therefore thought a quick reminder of this issue would be useful.

Fog fever is a condition usually seen in the autumn in adult cattle at grass. It is thought to be caused by the ingestion of a substance called L-tryptophan, which is converted in the rumen to substances which are toxic to lung tissue. The condition is most commonly seen within two weeks of a move from

sparse to lush pasture. It is usually seen in beef cattle, most likely due to the uniformity of dairy cattle grazing.
Mortality in severely affected animals can be high but usually only a small proportion of a group is obviously affected. However, up to 50% may be showing mild respiratory signs. There is a wide variation in the rate of onset and severity of clinical signs, with most cases occurring in the five days after exposure to the new pasture. Most deaths will occur in the first 2-3 days of an outbreak, and if affected animals get past day 5, their chance of recovery is good.
Severely affected cattle have difficulty breathing, often grunting when breathing out, and they froth at the mouth. They tend to be distressed, with open-mouthed breathing, but remain alert. They do not graze, and stand apart from the rest of the herd.
The other cause of pneumonia in cattle at grass is lungworm, and this needs to be ruled out. There are a couple of clues which can help to tell the difference between the two conditions. Unlike lungworm, cattle with fog fever tend not to cough. Additionally, fog fever is almost always seen only in cattle over two years of age. If calves at foot are also affected, then lungworm is the more likely diagnosis.
There is no specific treatment for fog fever, but supportive treatment may be given. Care must be taken as any extra stress, such as handling, can worsen the condition. In some outbreaks it may be appropriate to move affected cattle inside. However, the stress associated with movement may hasten death in severely affected animals.
If animals cannot be moved inside easily then the provision of supplementary feeding to lessen the intake of grass may be more appropriate. Severely affected animals may require immediate slaughter.
The previously grazed pasture may be poor, or may have been subjected to a prolonged period of grazing. The new pasture may or may not have been grazed during that summer, but usually there is regrowth of lush grass, legume or other palatable plants. The condition is often seen after a move to hay or silage aftermath. Most cases of the disease occur on pasture which has been fertilised. No specific species of grass or plants have been linked with the disease but the disease may recur on the same pasture in successive years. Following the first frost in the autumn the incidence of the disease tends to decline rapidly.
Prevention of this condition is through pasture management, gradually increasing grazing time over a period of 10-12 days. Because young stock are thought to be more tolerant to L-tryptophan, they can be used to graze lush pasture first. Strip grazing can also be useful, as can pre-feeding the cows so they are not being turned out onto lush pasture when they are hungry.

Improving Dairy Calf Health

It is now widely accepted that maximising pre-weaning growth rates in dairy heifers leads to earlier service and calving, and maximises milk production once the heifer enters the herd. With this in mind, increased quantities of milk are being fed, which can cause higher levels of nutritional scour. This reduces the availability of the milk and thus works against the plan to increase intakes and growth rates.
We have been approached about a new product on the market which is designed to limit the effects of nutritional scour. It is formulated to support the gut health of calves and increase digestibility of the milk. It has also been shown in a trial to increase growth rates, by weaning age, as a consequence. In addition, it contains trace elements and vitamins designed to support immunity.
The product is used from the second feed to weaning and is suitable for whole milk or replacer and for teat or bucket feeding as well as where automatic feeders are used. It is supplied in 7.5Kg buckets, enough for 2250 litres of milk.
If you would like more information, please let us know and we can discuss this with you further.

More Help for Calves

We have discussed above the effects difficult calvings can have on the cow, both immediately and in their reproductive future, but what about the calves? We all know the importance of getting good quality colostrum into neonatal calves as soon as possible, the benefits it brings and what can go wrong if this doesn't happen. This can be a challenge with some calves, especially after an assisted birth. The company above also produce a calf health and immunity support paste. There are a number of such pastes available on the market, all designed to improve appetite and give the calves a kick start. This paste is different to many of these as it doesn't contain caffeine. It's designed to be given to neonatal calves as soon as possible after birth, supporting healthy energy levels, vitality and activity over a prolonged period. It also contains B vitamins. Whilst it is designed to be given to new-born calves, it can be repeated at 5 days post calving. Another use is for calf rearers when a dose can be given as calves arrive on farm.

The company also produce a number of products to help support calf health. They have electrolyte powders and an electrolyte paste. The paste works in a similar way to the gel we find very effective, and can be given from the tube directly to the back of the tongue.
If you think any of the above may be of interest, please give us a ring to discuss, or catch us at your next visit.

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