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## Heifers with Udder Oedema (flag)

Heifers with flag (fluid swelling in the udder and under the belly) are a nuisance as they are prone to mastitis and are difficult to milk out. The ligaments that support the udder may stretch permanently.

Several different factors cause udder oedema: -

- salt retention by the heifer
- pressure on the veins returning blood from the mammary gland by the calf
- low protein levels in the blood as antibodies move from the heifer's blood to colostrum
- heavy grain feeding (especially in heifers)
- excess salt intake (sodium and potassium)
- insufficient intake of calcium

Heifers with flag can be treated with **Frusemide**, which is a diuretic that rapidly reduces the fluid swelling. Unfortunately, diuretics are not recommended to be used before calving. A dose of oxytocin (Letdown) after calving will help as well.

Before calving the options for treating flag are: -

- Induce calving with PG or a short-acting cortisone injection
- Milk affected heifers before calving
- Apply teat spray to heifers before calving. The glycerine will help with teat health and the disinfectant will help reduce mastitis. This is only practical if heifers are getting lead feed in the dairy.
- Add a calcium supplement such as limestone to the ration.

Heifers take longer to calve and lie down for longer periods during calving, so their udders are more likely to get contaminated with mud and manure. Older cows will boss heifers around and force them to calve in the worst area. For this reason, heifers should be calved in a separate paddock away from older cows.

If you are thinking of inducing heifers to calve we find that a short-acting cortisone, such as **Dexapent**, is a gentler option than **PG**. Heifers induced with **PG** are more likely to calve quickly but sometimes the cervix and birth canal do not dilate properly increasing the chance of tearing. Heifers induced with **Dexapent** are less likely to retain their afterbirth compared with heifers induced by **PG**.