Rochester Veterinary Practice 🐄 July 2020

NEWSLETTER

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Seasonal reminders:

- Cows should calve in a clean environment, so preparation of this area should start soon. Also make sure calf sheds are clean before the first batch arrives.

- Check dry cows each week for mastitis. Walk around them and look for swollen quarters. Any quarters that have mastitis should be treated as you would treat an infected quarter during lactation. Do **not** touch the other quarters unless they look suspicious.

Oleander poisoning

A local farmer recently lost two big, beautiful fat steers to what we think was oleander poisoning. Oleander contains a cardiac glycoside that is usually not very palatable. Once the leaves dry out, they seem to taste better. Young stock in particular may then nibble on them.

The cardiac glycoside in oleander affects the heart and death follows quickly.

It is best to be careful with all garden clippings but the two we see most trouble with are oleander and green cestrum (also known as willow leaved jessamine). Old abandoned or derelict farmhouses can have these and other dangerous plants in the garden.

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 that have already calved can be treated with **Frusemide**, which is a diuretic that rapidly reduces the fluid swelling. 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 it is possible.

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**.

Use Metricure early

We know that treating cows with Metricure when they have an infection in the uterus helps their fertility. If cows, with a discharge of pus from the cervix, are treated within 4 weeks of calving then their first-round conception rate is **48%**

compared with **22%** in untreated cows.

Which cows to check?
- **Cows with retained foetal membranes**
- **Stillbirth or a calf that dies within 24 hours of birth**
- **Twins**
- **Milk fever**
- **Discharge from vulva seen 7 days or more from calving**
- **Assisted calving**

It is important to be hygienic when checking to see if cows have a discharge from the cervix. If you use a gloved hand, make sure that you use disinfectant and that the vulva is cleaned properly.

The best way to check to see if a cow has a pus discharge is to use a metricheck device. This is a thin metal tube that has a rubber cup like an inside out squash ball.

Ideally, you should aim to treat dirty cows within **2 weeks** of calving to get the maximum benefit.

In the large trial at Maffra they found that when cows were treated with Metricure 6 weeks or more after calving that fertility was worse than when they were left untreated.

Our thinking is that when cows have been calved this long the cervix is shut tight and all the extra fiddling around passing the pipette does more harm than the good of the antibiotic.

Potential problems this season

Some of the beef heifers that have already calved this season have been fat and have had big calves due to an abundance of feed. We seem to see this problem more in older carryover

dairy heifers (30 months or more at the time of calving).

Milk fever

The other problem we are likely to see is milk fever. Some studies have shown that a clinical case rate of 5% in the herd is associated with a sub clinical rate of 33%. Cows with milk fever produce an average of 14% less in that lactation and have 3 times the risk of calving difficulties, RFM's and LDA's. They also have 9 times the risk of mastitis and ketosis and an increased risk of a prolapsed uterus, and of being culled!

If more than 3% of your herd required treating and/or you had cows under the age of 5 that had milk fever last year, milk fever prevention needs to be a focus this year.

The easiest and best way to prevent milk fever is to lead feed cows with grain containing anionic salts for a 3-week period before calving. The benefits of lead feeding are well established. As well as preventing milk fever lead feeding with grain enables cows to "hit their straps" earlier and produce more milk throughout the lactation. Milk fever prevention is a bonus to the benefits of lead feeding.

Anionic salts in the lead feed work by acidifying the blood, which makes calcium more available from the calcium reserves in the cow's skeleton.