

NEWSLETTER

In this issue:

- ◆ **Seasonal reminders**
- ◆ **The Scouring Milking Cow**
- ◆ **Abomasal ulcers in calves**
- ◆ **When to treat non-cycling cows**
- ◆ **How many bulls do I need?**
- ◆ **Other bull tips**

Seasonal reminders:

- Any calf that has an umbilical hernia needs treatment as soon as possible. The anaesthetic and surgery are much more difficult and prone to complications if the calf is bigger and older.
- Bulls should be fertility tested and vaccinated annually against vibrio and pestivirus at least 2 weeks before you plan to use them. All newly purchased bulls should be ear notched and tested for BVD.
- Late calving cows, especially older cows, are more prone to milk fever. Cows with milk fever in hot weather are very susceptible to heat stress. Douse cows with cold water if down and exposed to the sun or move into a shady spot.
- Disbudding spring born calves. It is best to get them disbudded between 2 and 8 weeks of age.

The Scouring Milking Cow

Our vets have seen a few dairy cows that have been scouring, had reduced milk production and reduced feed intake. On examination, the only abnormal finding is the faeces being of diarrhoea consistency.

The possible causes include:

1. *Nutrition related/ Indigestion* (such as change of feed source, eating spoiled/ mould affected hay or silage)
2. *Gastrointestinal parasitism* (worms or fluke)
3. *Ruminal acidosis* (eating too much grain)
4. *Salmonellosis*
5. *Yersiniosis*
6. *Coccidiosis*
7. *Acute bovine viral diarrhoea virus* (usually first calving cows)
8. *Johne's disease* (generally cows older than 4 years)

To investigate these cases further, i) Faecal samples are examined at the practice for worm eggs and coccidia oocytes, ii) Faecal samples are sent off to an external laboratory for bacterial culture and sensitivity and iii) ear notching young cows for BVDV PI testing.

Most of these samples have not had a worm burden, coccidia burden, have not grown any bacteria at the external laboratory and are not a BVDV PI animal. It is then assumed that the most likely cause of the scour is feed related.

It is recommended to give the cow a vitamin B complex injection (an appetite stimulant), isolate the cow (put her in the hospital herd or on her own) and offer the cow a 'bland' high fibre diet for a few days. The 'bland' diet may look like hay (oaten) only and no grain. Then slowly introduce the grain back into the diet over 3 to 5 days.

When to treat non-cycling cows

If cows have been treated with PG the best time to treat non-cyclers is 11 days after the last injection of PG. This is because the follicles in the ovaries are at the right stage to

respond to an injection of GnRH (Gonabreed).

It is tempting to treat non-cyclers a week or so after PG as most of the cows that were going to respond have already done so but it is better to wait the full 11 days.

In a double PG synchronisation program, by waiting until day 11, all cows are joined in the first 21 days of mating as the non-cycling cow treatment program is 10 days long.

Abomasal ulcers in calves

This spring we have seen a couple farms where multiple calves have died from abomasal ulcers.

Abomasal ulcers are common in calves 2 – 12 weeks of age. Most abomasal ulcers go unnoticed but some will become full thickness and cause the abomasum to rupture and the calves present acutely sick or are found dead.



The cause of abomasal ulcers is unclear. Risk factors include high fibrous diets or a change to a high fibrous diet, recent introduction to concentrate feeds, stressors (transportation, disbudding, nutritional changes etc), infectious causes (such as Clostridium spp, Salmonella spp, BVDV) and chemical injury to the abomasum (dairy wash detergent).

Prevention of abomasal ulcers is through identifying risk factors specific to your farm and reducing their impact on the calves.

How many bulls do I need?

More than you had last year – is the answer on most farms. Every year during pregnancy testing we see examples where the bulls have left too many empty cows.

The message from InCalf is that you need 3 bulls for every 100 cows at the **start of the AI period** or 4 per 100 cows if synchrony is used. This means that if you have 200 cows to join at the start of AI you will need between 6 and 8 bulls.

This assumes a 6-week AI period where you get just over half the cows pregnant. Our district average 6-week in calf rate is about 53% which means that in our herd of 200 cows there will be, on average, 90 something empty cows when the bulls go in.

It is important to have the bulls on the farm several weeks before they are due to start work. Sperm production is a delicate business, and the stress of transport and acclimatisation will upset sperm quality. The production line for sperm takes 70 days so it can take this long to correct any problems.

Aim to give the bulls plenty of time to socialise before they are put to work. Bulls will work out a hierarchy or pecking order and it is better to do this well before they are expected to find cows on heat and get them pregnant. You want your bulls to be lovers not fighters.

Other bull tips

➤ Keep the resting bulls away from the dairy

The group of bulls that are resting should be kept in an area that has plenty of shade and water. If that area is near the dairy the bulls that are with the cows will try to stop the cows from going anywhere near the resting bulls. If you have ever had a bull that walks in front of the cows and slows things down it is usually because he is trying to keep “his” cows away from his rivals.

➤ Keep bulls off concrete

There has been a swing towards using Friesian bulls over the last few years. In that time, we have seen both more injured cows and more lame bulls.

Big bulls are more prone to feet problems, so it is worth the extra hassle of drafting them off before they reach the concrete. This is difficult the

first few times, but it is worthwhile persisting as bulls will eventually learn what to do.

It is also important that they do not get access to too much grain as this can also affect their feet. If bulls are rotated regularly and get no grain when they are rested - and then a big slug again when they are with the cows - it is likely they will get laminitis and more feet problems.

➤ Vaccinate your bulls with pestigard and vibrovax

Pestigard protects bulls against infection with BVD. If you have a BVD carrier in your herd unprotected bulls can get a mild and temporary infection with BVD that has a serious effect on fertility.

Vibrio is a sexually transmitted disease spread from cow to cow by the bulls. Vaccinating halts the spread.

All bulls should be ear notch tested for BVD when they first arrive on your farm.

➤ Virgin bulls need training

It usually takes virgin bulls about a week to learn what they are supposed to do. If you have some empty carry-over cows that are on heat before the bulls are due to start it might be worth running these cows with the virgin bulls to let them, get some practice.

➤ Rotate bulls every 4 to 7 days

Young bulls exhaust their supplies more quickly than older bulls and probably need to rest after 4 days. Older bulls' pace themselves better but should not be left with the cows for longer than 7 days without a break.

➤ Watch bulls mate

Make sure that each bull is capable of mating with cows on heat. There are many reasons why bulls cannot mate successfully, including: -

- Sore feet
- Sore back
- Damaged penis
- Hair ring around penis
- Low libido (no interest)