



Newsletter

April 2021

Huskvac

After the heavy rain in recent months, lungworm may be a significant risk on many pastures in the next grazing season as infective larvae are washed out of fecal pats onto vegetation. Don't forget that unlike many gut worms, lungworm can remain infective on pastures for much longer periods of time and as such it is very difficult to make use of "clean grazing".

Vaccination is a great start in preventing clinical disease, but don't forget that vaccinated animals will have to have exposure to lungworm larvae to boost their immunity so don't over-treat for worms at pasture. We can provide you with copies of "Control Of Worms Sustainably" (COWS) which offers advice on sensible worming. (similar to SCOPS protocols in sheep)

2 doses need to be given about 4 weeks apart and the course needs to be completed 2 weeks before turnout.

Why improve fertility?

Whilst there is little that can be done to influence milk price, improving production efficiency is something we can help with. Usually the greatest improvement in the shortest time is by improving fertility.

Poor fertility reduces genetic gain, decreases milk production, disrupts the pattern of milk production (so that on seasonal contracts production at peak prices is reduced), cuts calf sales, increases the number of heifers that need to be reared, and increases the costs of AI. In this age of ever increasing scrutiny on the environment, it also increases your carbon footprint. Although there may be an increased risk of peri-parturient disease as animals calve more frequently, this is easily outweighed by the benefits on well managed units.

Although it has a multitude of effects, the costs of poor fertility can be calculated from its impact on involuntary culling and increased calving interval. This is data we look at regularly with farms which have routine visits, but for those of you we don't see so often, we can go through some basic costs using only a few headline figures, some basic assumptions and some computer software. Please get in touch if you'd like to discuss it and see how we can help.

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Hypomagnesaemia (Grass Staggers, Grass Tetany)

The average annual incidence of acute grass staggers in the UK is under 1 per cent. Most cases occur in recently-calved beef cows but disease can also occur in dairy cows particularly if unsupplemented during the dry period. There is a range of clinical signs from sub-clinical disease to sudden death. Acute grass staggers is a true veterinary emergency, if you suspect it ring us straight away. Never give cows magnesium in the vein, it can cause fatal heart disturbances.

Despite its vital importance, there are no specific control mechanisms for magnesium levels. The amount and concentration of magnesium in the body is dependent upon absorption from the gut, the requirement for milk production - and excretion by the kidneys. Factors influencing the availability of dietary magnesium include magnesium levels in the grass which can vary considerably. High levels of some fertilisers inhibit magnesium absorption. Lush pastures are low in fibre and increase the rate of passage of food through the gut reducing time for the absorption.



In acute disease there is initial excitability with high head carriage, twitching of muscles and incoordination. Affected cows become separated from the group and have a startled expression, show an exaggerated blink reflex and frequent grinding of the teeth. There is rapid progression to seizures with paddling of the limbs, sudden eye movements, teeth grinding and frothy salivation.



Death may follow at any stage. Relapses are common even after treatment. The majority of cows in the group may be affected subclinically. Subclinical disease often goes unrecognised but investigations have revealed an annual rate of 3-4 per cent in lactating dairy cows. Cows may appear slightly nervous, are reluctant to be milked or herded, and have depressed dry matter intake and poor milk yield.

The total diet should contain 2.5g/kg DM of magnesium to meet requirements of the majority of lactating cows at pasture. The best method is to use 60g magnesium oxide (calcined magnesite) per cow per day in high-magnesium cobs. The sole water supply can be medicated with soluble magnesium salts. Intra-ruminal boluses give a slow release of relatively small amounts of magnesium into the rumen over a period of four weeks. Magnesium salts and minerals are unpalatable therefore ad-lib mineral licks are not satisfactory. Supplementation is especially important during stormy weather when roughage, such as straw, can be beneficial for beef cows.