



### Digital Dermatitis Control

Digital dermatitis is still a very significant cause of lameness. Whilst we have come a long way to reduce the level within the national herd, there is definitely a lot more to be done to control this costly disease. Spirochete bacteria survive in slurry, in water, in the environment and on contaminated equipment.

#### Prevention:

**Slurry** - As it is caused by Spirochete bacteria that survives and is spread in faecal material, slurry management underpins herd level control. Automatic scrapers run infrequently can create a bow wave of excess fluid that submerges feet, spreading cases between cows. Set scrapers to run as often as possible and if scraping with a tractor then do this with cows not present (sounds logical I know!) and use hand scrapers to get hard to reach places. Cubicle and feed face management to keep straight, smooth edges is also crucial to completely remove all slurry. Buying in cows also leaves herds open to new infection that spread rapidly within a naive herd – quarantine new stock and check for lesions.

**Foot bathing** – many of you are foot bathing but are still struggling to control herd level lesions. Whilst foot bathing protocols need to be farm specific there are some guidelines that are key to all farms:

- Footbath milking cows daily (system needs to be easy to fill, clean and administer to ensure it is done 7 days a week – automatically refilling baths really start to sound more cost effective and will ensure a maximum number of cows before it empties and refills)
- Footbath dry cows twice weekly
- Dimensions: 4m long to allow for repeat foot immersions and allow 6-8 inches of fluid depth. If the footbath is close to the parlour exit, good cow flow is important and so these footbaths need to be wide enough for 2 cows to pass each other or walk through at the same time.
- Easy to drain and clean as organic material build up will reduce effectiveness
- Product – accurately diluted product such as formalin to 5% - refilling often results in a much lower concentration. Recalculate your footbath volume ( $\text{Length(cm)} \times \text{Width(cm)} \times \text{Depth of water(cm)} = \text{Volume in cm}^3$ ) Then divide this number by 1000 and that gives you Litres!!
- Unlicensed antibiotic foot bathing needs to stop – it is often painful and unjustified due to little evidence for their success. All the antibiotics being used are on the list of critical antibiotics and are not licensed for foot bathing so trigger a 7 day milk withdrawal



#### Treatment:

When we fail to cure digital dermatitis lesions, the cows can go on to develop a chronic lesion called an M4 lesion. These lesions are often dormant for a while but continue to shed the pathogen to other cows. It is vital that we successfully cure cows of initial infections to prevent this chronic group developing. A study was performed regarding the success of antibiotic topical spray treatments. Where this treatment protocol seems to be failing to control and reduce lesions on farms, it is most likely as a result of the application being done in the wrong environment and with little regard to the action of the product.



Antibiotic sprays only work when DIRECTLY IN CONTACT WITH THE SKIN and the lesion, with no gross contamination and allowed to dry before walking on it through slurry. Antibiotic sprays are not to be applied in the parlour for several reasons – contamination on teats and therefore the milk through aerosol and also the inability to properly clean the lesion or apply spray to the lesion itself. The lesion often runs forward through the cleft and so spraying the foot on the floor will miss areas.

The application protocol used was as follows using topical oxytetracycline (Engemycin spray)

- Lift foot in crush
- Wash foot with clean water and dry with paper towel
- Spray lesion with topical application
- Leave to dry for 30 seconds
- Reapply spray for a second time
- Lower foot and repeat for a further two consecutive days

Bandaging is often used but is costly and if bandages are not removed within 24 hours then they create the perfect environment for the infection to worsen and often cause long lasting damage. In this trial the combination of proper foot bathing and the above treatment protocol was very successful in treating cases as well as reducing new and recurring cases. Speak to us about how you are going to step up digital dermatitis control on your farm.



Whilst we have touched on Engemycin spray and antibiotic usage there is another area to explore regards topical spray. We find that due to its distinctive colour, Engemycin spray gets used for identifying animals on the head or udder, spraying navels and a plethora of other uses. As an antibiotic it is essential that we stop this random use to preserve it for treating skin infections as discussed above.

**ID** – Stock marker is significantly cheaper and lasts longer as it was designed for the job

**Navel spray** – Antibiotic spray is not to be used for navel dipping. The idea behind navel dipping is to dry the navel cord to stop bacteria from moving up the cord and causing an infection. The most common product for this is Strong Iodine 10% - it contains ethanol (alcohol to you and I) that dries out the cord very effectively. If you would rather not use iodine due to allergies and staining or like having smaller containers with a spray cap then we have an alternative product – Super 7Plus – this is coloured like iodine so it is easy to check application but it is actually alkaline electrolysed reducing water. Speak to us to order today



## KILO Club

We were delighted with the turnout for the first meeting of our beef discussion group – the KILO Club. The torrential weather definitely boosted numbers but did not deter everyone from having a good walk through the cattle which looked great, if a little damp. We discussed the areas of fertility that allow units to be productive and the take home messages definitely hinged around recording information and analysing the figures that you are already recording for other purposes (birth dates, weights, sires). Speak to us about getting a beef recording sheet if you are interested and prompt some changes to your next calving block. Thanks to the Tweenhills team for being wonderful hosts and to Aureum Catering for a fabulous lunch. Even the cows fancied a brownie!

### Meetings

#### Rearing Dairy Genetics for Beef Production

WEDNESDAY 28<sup>th</sup> JUNE

11am – 2.30pm

By kind permission of Mr and Mrs Pullen

Reddings Farm, Badgeworth Lane, Badgeworth,  
Cheltenham GL51 4UW

Book your place on: 01904 771212 with

[AHDB Beef and Lamb with Wood Vets](#)

The next beef meeting is a combined effort with AHDB Beef and Lamb focusing on taking dairy cross genetic calves and rearing them in a beef rearing system – please see the advert.

