



In February we discussed the preparation of cattle ready for grazing and protecting naive animals against lungworm through vaccination. Whilst cattle may have been out at pasture for a day or two last week, we are still a few weeks away from full turnout. This gives us time to review a few more grazing issues with time to plan any changes:

Blackleg

The incidence of Clostridial disease is highest when livestock are at pasture ingesting soil contaminated grass. Heavily contaminated silage can also trigger cases. Blackleg is the most common clostridial disease for cattle. We see areas of muscle that are necrotic (dead) with a characteristic black colour as seen in this picture:



Depending upon which muscle group is affected, animals present with lameness, loss of appetite, rapid breathing and fever but most commonly these are very fit, well animals that are just found dead. Calves are highest risk especially from 10 months to 2 years old. This is linked to erupting

teeth, wounds, dirty injection sites and trauma from bulling injuries. Due to the lack of warning and no particular scenario for avoidance it is best to vaccinate these high risk young stock with Bravoxin 10 vaccine.

- Primary course of two injections 4-6 weeks apart covers the grazing season
- Annual booster every 12 months gives continued immunity
- Cattle can be vaccinated from as early as two weeks old on high risk farms but if the dam has had her booster 8 to 2 weeks prior to calving down, then the calf will be covered until 12 weeks old by colostrum transfer of maternal antibodies. Calves then requires a full starter course at 12 weeks of age.
- Calves vaccinated under 3 months old need a second full starter course at 3 months old

Hypomagnesaemia / Grass Staggers

With hints of spring sunshine with intermittent showers grass growth ought to be plentiful over the coming weeks ready for turnout. However, spring grazing is very low in magnesium and also low in fibre so grass passes through the gut quickly. This reduces the absorption of what little magnesium is present. Those of you top dressing or mixing minerals in exposed feed faces will see the run off effect of rain. This is important when minerals are costly to buy in and have a strong link to metabolic diseases in calving cows. Key areas are: -

- Cows will twitch or seem unsteady on their feet. Affected animals can often be hyper excitable/sensitive to stimulation which can make them dangerous to handle, so please take care.



- Frothing around the mouth, exaggerated blinking and teeth grinding can also be seen. Clinical signs in acute cases can progress quickly and often the animal will just be found as a 'sudden death'.
- Ruminants cannot store magnesium and rely on daily dietary intake:
 - 60g/cow/day of calcined magnesite or Cal Mag needs to be given orally somewhere in the diet
 - Supplementation can be done in a concentrate feed, in a TMR ration or in water
 - As it can be very bitter it is vital to dose correctly and mix well into rations
- When adding Magnesium to water sources:
 - No other water source must be available
 - If the grazing is very wet, uptake of water from troughs may be low so increase the dose
 - Do not let magnesium chloride accumulate in the bottom of troughs as it is very bitter. Clean troughs often when treated with Magnesium.
- Start using magnesium well before grazing. Cows do not store Magnesium well so a “run-up” access period is required to ensure no cases straight after turnout.
- Try and buffer feed animals with more fibrous foods at pasture to slow down gut passage and increase magnesium uptake (i.e. silage or hay)
- Avoid relying on mineral blocks as there can be a huge variation in how much individual cows use them, especially with dominant behaviours and bullying. This leaves cows still at risk of staggers
- Avoid Potash application onto grazing pastures in the spring as this depresses the level of Magnesium found in grass. (NB Slurry contains high levels of potash so acts the same way)

Magnesium deficiency is usually a combination of low magnesium levels and a stress event that triggers disease. For most stock this will be adverse weather whilst out grazing but could also be events such as weaning calves for beef animals, bulling for spring block calving herds or water restriction for any stock. Try and minimise stressors at the most dangerous times of the year for low Magnesium – spring and autumn.

Treating cows for hypomagnesaemia is often very unsuccessful so take preventative actions

IS HE UP TO THE CHALLENGE?

In a year when forage is in short supply, farms need to make sure they are getting an efficient return for their investment in forages, bedding, time and labour. Whilst we ensure that cows are pregnant before committing to feed and house them in the upcoming year we are not always as strict with breeding males. However UK studies show that 30% of bulls tested were sub-fertile. Bulls need to be able to get 45 out of 50 cows pregnant within a 9 week block in order to earn their place in the breeding herd. When bulls are not fertility tested prior to breeding, performance is unknown until the PD session by which point it is often far too late to rectify without extending the calving block. By performing a bull fertility test 6 to 10 weeks prior to the start of work, we can highlight issues ahead of service. This allows for problems to be rectified or in the worst case scenario for a new bull to be purchased and quarantined ahead of work. Join us at the KILO Club Bull Fertility meeting to learn more about what it means to have a bull tested and how you can incorporate it into your farm plan.



Meetings

Beef KILO Club

Demo day: Bull fertility and heifer pelvic measurements

Thursday 28th March 2019

Invite to follow

Meetings

Dairy KPI Meeting

Mastitis Update

Wednesday 27th March 2019

11-2pm at Quedgeley
Lunch will be provided