McKenzie, Bryson and Marshall

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Abomasal Disease

We have recently seen a lot of cows with abomasal (fourth stomach) problems. This is not expected when cows are at grass and it is possible that diet changes associated with housing cows for short periods during bad weather may be a factor. Diagnosis is usually straightforward at clinical examination.

Left displaced abomasums (LDA) or 'twisted stomach': This is a common disease of dairy cows occurring within the first 2-months of lactation. Cows will typically show poor milk yield and a lack of appetite particularly for concentrates along with acetonaemia (sweet smelling breath). The cause is not fully understood but good nutrition of the transition cow and avoiding fat cows at calving are all associated with a low incidence of the condition. Cows experiencing any other disease soon after calving are more likely to go on to develop LDA. *Treatment* by surgical correction as soon as possible after diagnosis is the best course of action when success rates in excess of 90% are achieved. The LDA can be corrected by rolling the cow but 20% success rates are the norm as recurrence is very common so we do not recommend this treatment.

LDA Operation— placing sutures to anchor the abomasum on the right side

Right displaced abomasums (RDA): This is less common than LDA but is a more serious condition and recovery rates are lower. The presenting signs are similar to LDA as are the causes which, however, are less well understood. Medical treatment may be successful if initiated soon after onset of signs but a significant number of cases do not respond and either die or need to be culled. Occasionally the RDA can twist which makes the cow seriously unwell with abdominal pain. Surgical treatment has a low success rate.

Lungworm

Several dairy herds have experienced lung worm in adult cows with deaths. Coughing in the herd and / or reduced production are the earliest signs that there may be a problem. Treatment with anthelmintic is required quickly and prevention involves designing anthelmintic control programmes for youngstock that allow development of immunity to lungworm and / or use of lung worm vaccination. Cattle need to be challenged with lungworm every grazing season to maintain immunity.

Pneumonia Vaccination

For Spring born suckled calves now is the time to plan a pre-housing vaccination programme. Rispoval 4 (Pfizer) and Bovipast RSP (Intervet Schering Plough) require two doses three to four weeks and four weeks apart respectively with the second vaccination completed at least two-weeks before housing to ensure maximum protection for the high risk period. Don't forget that calves need to be over 3-months of age before their first vaccination with Rispoval 4 otherwise antibody from colostrum can interfere with the vaccination. If they are younger than this please contact us for alternative options such as Rispoval RSV+PI3 intranasal (Pfizer). Farmers housing spring born calves this autumn will be interested in the article overleaf on the key points to minimise pneumonia.

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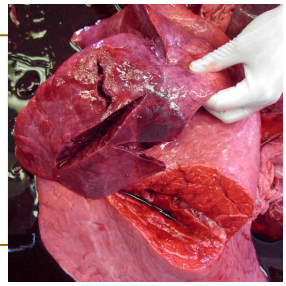
Minimising pneumonia in spring born calves this autumn

There are four key areas to address

- Parasite control
- Creep feeding
- Vaccination
- Housing and weaning



Lungs from a calf with acute pneumonia. The purple area is pneumonic lung whilst the pink area is normal lung. No wonder there is a big set back in growth in animals that survive.

Parasite control

Pasture worm burdens are often highest in autumn. Clinical/ subclinical worms and lungworm in particular will reduce performance plus it will make calves more vulnerable to pneumonia. Treat them with a long acting product up to one month pre-housing.

Creep feeding

Continental bred calves around six months of age will have a food conversion efficiency of 4:1, so creep feeding ideally in troughs to limit intakes to 1-2kg per day depending on grass supply will improve performance and reduce the growth check on calves at weaning.

Vaccination

While pneumonia can occur at any stage the risk is highest in recently housed and/or weaned calves. Stress and weather patterns play a huge part so vaccination to reduce the risk is beneficial. Consult the practice for the best option for your farm situation depending on likely causes and the balance between need for fast onset of immunity and long lasting immunity. Plan well in advance and tie in vaccination with other tasks such as scanning cows or removing the bull.

Vaccines help to prevent pneumonia but only if the risk factors for pneumonia on the farm are also addressed, the right vaccine is used for the situation and the vaccine is administered correctly and at the right time.

Housing and weaning

Avoid multiple stressors on one day where possible. Either wean calves pre-housing or a few weeks after housing. House cattle in advance of bad weather if possible and give the highest risk animals' preferential treatment e.g. a straw bedded shed initially.

Ensure sheds have adequate outlets in the roof and that air comes in above the level of the calf. If calves are caught standing in a draught from an open door this can be the trigger to a disease outbreak.

Well ventilated buildings are essential. The inlets for this building are excellent.

The most common ventilation defect is failure to provide an adequate outlet in the ridge of the roof as shown here. On still days sufficient air will not enter the building through the inlets no matter how big they are unless air can also exit the building through a big outlet in the roof.

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