

Newsletter October 2010

Lameness in cattle

Lameness continues to be a major problem on many dairy farms. Lameness is not a disease in itself, but is a clinical sign of a problem. Why is it a problem? Lameness will generally give less milk, milk of poorer quality, they will be more susceptible to mastitis and they will eat less and may be less fertile. They are also in pain and constitute a welfare problem especially if we expect them to walk a similar distance to a sound animal or to compete with sound animals in a cubicle situation.

The causes of lameness can be broadly divided into infectious causes and injury problems.

The two major infectious causes are Foul of the Foot or Lure and Digital Dermatitis. Foul affects the skin between the digits and causes a severe painful lameness. Digital Dermatitis infects the skin above the coronary band at the front or back of the hoof, again a severe lameness can result. Both conditions respond to antibiotics and control can be maintained by the use of foot baths. If left untreated both infectious causes will result in foot lesions that may shorten the life of the animal.

The common causes of injury that result in lameness are hoof overgrowth, too long left standing or penetrations of the sole by thorns or grit ground into the foot. Overgrowth allows the white line to become weaker, the sole to develop ulcers and the balance of the foot to alter with the weight being carried on the heel and the toes pointing to the sky. Penetrations result in the formation of an abscess within the hoof capsule, which, if the pus is not allowed to escape, may develop into the loss of the complete sole, a pus discharge at the coronary band or deep foot infections involving the joints within the hoof.

Whatever the cause of lameness it is essential to know what problem you are dealing with. The only way to make a diagnosis is to pick up the offending foot and after cleaning the area pare the foot to reveal the cause then specific advice can be given to reduce more cases. Please ask for assistance if you need help.

Several milk buyers are now expecting their farmers to be undertaking 'Mobility Scoring' of the herds 4 – 6 times a year. The buyers are concerned that the public are becoming more welfare conscious and rightly expect their producers to be looking at ways to improve herd health. The scheme requires all animals to be inspected walking on a flat concrete floor and a score allocated depending on the lameness detected; 0 for no lameness, 1 for 'not even' at walk, 2 for obvious lameness and the foot is identifiable and 3 for severe lameness. The data obtained from such scoring needs to be collated and assessed and action taken to improve lameness on the farm.

Over the coming weeks we will be holding Mobility Scoring seminars to assist all our farmers get the most from this activity. If you would like to join on of our seminars please let us know in the next 2 weeks. JHC.



Herdsure Cattle Health Improvement Service

Liver fluke testing under the Herdsure scheme should be undertaken from November to January.

In dairy herds bulk milk serology can be done for liver fluke and then dry cows and youngstock can be blood tested or faecal samples examined.

Basic herdsure testing costs range from £60 - £130/year for a dairy herd. This includes sampling and testing to determine liver fluke status, advice on appropriate treatments and management measures.

Follow up samples the following year can show how effective treatment and management has been and hopefully remove liver fluke from your herd.

The drier summer conditions this year have resulted in a lower liver fluke forecast than the past 3 years. Moderate prevalence is suggested for this area of the country.

The VLA reported liver fluke disease in a high percentage of submissions in 2009 and the first quarter of 2010.

Metacercariae (infective immature form of flukes) start to appear on pasture in early September with disease from late October in medium risk areas. Cattle should be dosed after housing except dairy cattle, which cannot be treated when milking.

Sheep on farms with known fluke populations should be treated in October. If there is no previous evidence of fluke disease in sheep, post mortems can be done or blood sampling for liver enzymes.

Please contact us if you want more details on liver fluke or the Herdsure service. Herdsure also covers BVD and Johnes disease, IBR, Leptospirosis and Neospora. JT