



Cattle Newsletter

Late Spring/Early Summer 2009

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Fly Control

As summer approaches, the number of flies will increase. At the very least these will be a nuisance, irritating cows and people alike, interrupting normal behaviour, including grazing, and reducing productivity. At worst they will carry and spread disease. In sheep, fly strike can be horrible with a mass of maggots eating the affected animal alive. In cattle, summer mastitis and eye problems are more usual consequences.

Pour-on preparations, Swish, for example, and Spot On can provide reasonable fly control, especially if first applied before flies become a problem and if they are then reapplied regularly. Our prices for these products are currently:

Spot-On

- 250ml £39.52
- 500ml £65.86
- 1L £105.37
- 2½L £254.74 (price per adult cow treatment - £1.02)

Butox Swish

- 250ml £12.52
- 1L £42.28
- 2½L £87.52
- Economy Pack (11L)
..... £292.28 (price per adult cow treatment - 80p)

Twenty.One

In addition to treating your livestock, we have been in negotiation with a company producing a product called Twenty.One which can be used within buildings. Twenty.One contains a pheromone which attracts flies to it and a rapidly acting insecticide which kills flies within minutes of landing on it. This product can be mixed into a solution and sprayed within buildings but it works best if it is mixed to the consistency of wallpaper paste and painted in discrete

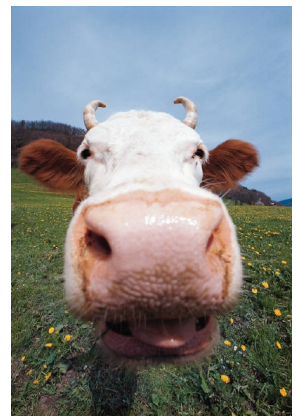
patches a couple of feet square at strategic places. Obvious possibilities include the parlour, the dairy, the collecting yard (if enclosed), calving boxes, beef sheds, pig buildings etc.

Twenty.One is available in 1kg packs, each containing four 250g sachets, costing £78.00 + VAT. Each application should remain active attracting and killing flies for eight weeks so one pack should provide sufficient product for season long fly control.

Fly Parasites

A novel approach to fly control involves using fly parasites which are distributed in areas where flies breed, dung heaps or slurry pits for example. These parasites attack the fly larvae and prevent them from developing. We can supply these in packs suitable to control flies on a 100 cow dairy farm at a cost of £45.00 + VAT per pack. The distribution of more parasites every two weeks is recommended.

Please do not hesitate to contact either Daniel in our dispensary or any of our farm animal vets to discuss your fly control product requirement further.



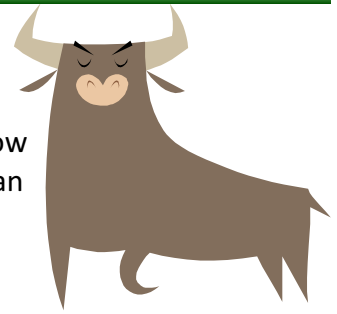
Psoroptic Mange in Cattle



Psoroptic mange has recently been causing concern to cattle farmers in Pembrokeshire. It causes severe skin irritation, similar to sheep scab (although the mites are species specific so they do not cross to sheep, nor do sheep scab mites infect cattle), resulting in affected animals rubbing themselves sore. This has a significant impact on welfare and productivity. Treatment with pour-on avermectins (effectively Eprinex in dairy cattle) is ineffective and permethrins (Swish, Spot On and Fly Pour) are only partially effective and may require multiple applications every couple of weeks.

It would appear that this parasite has been imported with cattle from Belgium and is likely to spread as cattle move around the country (a suspect case is already under investigation in Lancashire). We would urge caution when purchasing cattle from any source. Attention should be paid to skin and coat condition (although the problem is not always obvious in the early stages) and to biosecurity in general. If you think your cattle may be affected a visit from a vet to collect samples and to confirm the diagnosis might be a very sensible investment.

The Importance of Assessing Bull Fertility



As many of you are aware, as a practice we annually test many of your bulls for breeding soundness with the aid of an electroejaculator. The purpose of this article is to illustrate how important this testing is. Despite many bulls remaining sound year after year, the effects can be quite catastrophic if a fall in the fertility of a bull goes undetected. This was brought quickly home only recently when a client brought in two bulls for their suckler herd.

The herd consisted of 136 breeding cows and four bulls (including the two new bulls). During the service period the cows were split into two approximately equal groups, the old bulls were put with one group and the new bulls with the other. The new bulls were tested for BVD, IBR, leptospirosis and John's disease and treated for common parasitic diseases on arrival, but because the vendor assured our client that he had never had any problems with his bulls' fertility it was decided not to semen test them. PDing the herd after the bulls had been taken out a couple of months later gave the following results:

	In Calf	Empty
Cows with new bulls (Group A)	12	54
Cows with old bulls (Group B)	64	6

As you can see, the results were horrific. We followed this up with a thorough investigation to determine why there were so few animals in-calf in Group A. The most interesting findings were when we performed a semen test on the bulls. Both new bulls gave very poor samples. The motility of the sperm was almost nil, with only a handful of live sperm present amongst thousands of dead sperm. Although this is probably a very unlucky coincidence, if the bulls had been split up and one new infertile bull put with each old bull in each group, the problem may never have been noticed. It is likely conception rates would have dropped, but possibly if the old fertile bulls were clearing up after the new ones it may not have been half as bad as the above results. If this had happened the poor conception may well have been put down to other causes and not noted until some time in the future. By then far greater costs would have been incurred. This brings us to the cost to this herd of not semen testing these bulls.

If a 90% conception rate could have been achieved, there should have been 122 out of 136 cows in calf. However, only 76 were actually in calf. $122 - 76 = 46$. 46 extra cows should have been in calf if conception rate had been 90%. To get back on track quickly, our client sold these empty cows and bought-in 46 in-calf heifer replacements (hopefully without bringing in more problems). Below is a summary of the costs:

	Costs	Income
2 bulls + haulage	£2,850	
46 × in-calf heifers @ £673	£30,958	
46 × £6 haulage	£276	
2 × infertile bulls (sold Dec 08)		£1,279.90
46 × empty cows @ £458		£21,068.00
46 × marketing fees + haulage @ £30.12	£1,385.52	
Total	£35,469.52	£22,347.90
Loss	£13,121.62	

The consequential losses of the extended calving pattern and quality of progeny are obviously not included in this. Neither are the costs of re-starting vaccination programmes in these new animals and they still need to buy two new bulls!

This is, of course, an extreme example, but it is important to remember that your bulls are half your herd and if they are just slightly infertile it can have far bigger consequences than a problem in one or two of your cows.

When testing bulls we find that there is a spectrum of fertility from very high to very low. A fertile bull should impregnate by natural service. Subfertile bulls can achieve pregnancies by natural service, but not at the rate achieved by a fertile bull and infertile bulls cannot achieve any pregnancies.

An important point to remember is that, no matter how good a bull is genetically or otherwise, if he is subfertile calvings will be delayed resulting in smaller weaners and failure of cows to return to oestrus within optimum periods.

Infertility is not always permanent and can come on at any stage should the bull suffer injury or infection. A semen test normally takes about forty-five minutes. However, a lot of time is taken up setting up the necessary equipment so the more bulls you test the less time it takes per animal.

To do the semen test we need the bull to be restrained somewhere where we can have access to the side of the bull to catch the sample, and also from behind him to conduct the examination. We need somewhere near by with shelter and electricity to examine the sample under the microscope, and some warm water.

It is best to do the testing on warmer days if possible and when the bulls have had about one week's rest from serving cows. The procedure itself is pretty simple and most bulls do not seem to suffer any discomfort. It is a small price to pay when you realise what costs can be incurred if a bull is infertile.

Bluetongue - Current Situation

We have already seen a good uptake in vaccine against BT-8 from our farmers this year and orders continue to come into dispensary daily. If you have not ordered your vaccine yet, you should be advised that the midge season is fast approaching and therefore the risk of BT-8 entering the country is ever increasing. Some of you may have heard of another Bluetongue strain that has been found in Northern Europe - BT-1. Whilst there are plans for a multivalent vaccine, ie: one that protects against BT-8 and BT-1, it is not thought that this will become available until the latter part of the year. For this reason farmers are being advised not to wait for this to come out, but to vaccinate against BT-8 now. Other strains of Bluetongue have also been causing disease outbreaks in parts of Europe. These include BT-6, BT-11 and BT-16. Although BT-8 was not found circulating in the UK last year, it certainly was in France and for this reason we must not be complacent and vaccinate as there is a serious risk that midges could spread the disease across the channel.

Staff News

Saturday 25 April dawned bright and clear, if somewhat breezy; perfect for blowing wedding veils about. And so during the early afternoon Amy became Mrs Avery. Mingled amongst the many family and friends present at Bramshaw Church to witness the start of Amy and Alex's married life were clients (including the church organist) and many vets. Stephen gave one of the readings and Janneke, all the way from Holland, was one of the bridesmaids.

After a week in the Peak District (many people mistakenly thought Amy and Alex had gone to the Lake District for the week and the earthquake that occurred there during that week was no coincidence!), Amy is now back at work but is due to leave in the middle of June to travel extensively through the southern hemisphere. How plans will change during this time and what the future will hold, no one can be certain about, but we have made our position clear to Amy. We hope she will return. Equally, Amy has promised to keep in touch and to discuss her future with us when she does return.

A message from Amy ...

Many of you are aware I am leaving the practice at the end of June to go travelling and work in New Zealand for a year. I would like to thank everyone I have worked with over the last three years for all the support you have given me. I have really enjoyed working at Endells and much of that has been down to the people I have worked with (ie: you!), so thank you. I hope I gain plenty of different cattle and sheep experience, which perhaps I may bring back in a couple of years' time.

All the best to everyone, Amy.

Pieter, after two and a half years with us (an almost record period of employment in his career so far!) is also leaving at the end of June. Pieter is going to join a friend in a much smaller practice in Cumbria where he hopes to be able to spend more time working with sheep, his main veterinary passion, and less time travelling to Yorkshire to indulge his other great passion.

We would like to thank both Amy and Pieter for the valuable work they have done for both us and you over recent years.

Recruiting new vets, especially farm vets, is not easy but we have been very fortunate on this occasion to secure the services of two farmer's sons.

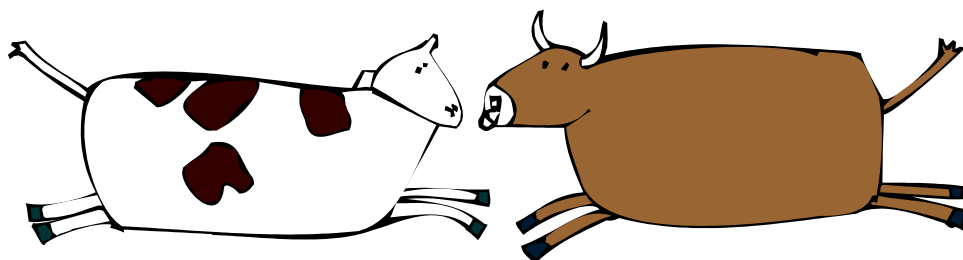
Will Sheppard comes from a dairy farming family based in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, and is due to qualify from the Bristol University Veterinary School (like Keith, Stephen and Amy) within a few weeks. During his training, he has seen most of his practice with the Larkmead Veterinary Group, a practice we know well and who spoke very highly of his abilities. (Their exact words were; 'If we had a vacancy we would have no hesitation in employing him immediately.') Will's main area of interest is in dairy herd health and production, especially fertility, mastitis and lameness. In his personal statement he wrote: 'I believe that farm animal veterinary

work will continue to be a vital part of the veterinary profession as disease surveillance becomes increasingly important and consumer demands put extra pressure on producers. It is also clear that farm vets will have to take on an advisory role focussing on herd level care rather than the individual animal. I would like to get involved with carrying out more frequent herd health studies and analysis to give constructive feedback and advice to the producer.' We are hoping that Will will be able to take up his position with us during the second half of July.

Stewart Barr, who trained at the Glasgow University School, comes from a mixed beef and arable farm (he is an experienced combine driver) on the Essex/Cambridgeshire border. He has spent time with the Willows Veterinary Group, a large and well known cattle practice in Cheshire and has experience of the cattle industry in both Canada and New Zealand. Like Will, his major interest is in cattle fertility and, in the dairy herd, mastitis and cell count control. We hope Stewart will begin working for us in mid-September when he finishes his current summer job (driving the combine on the family farm!).

In order to bridge the gap between Amy and Pieter leaving and Will and Stewart starting we have decided to offer a short term position to Kristina Dykes. Kristina is from New Zealand where she already has considerable experience of farm animal practice, not only with dairy cattle but particularly with beef cattle and sheep. She has come to England to further her veterinary experience and to travel. We hope that Kristina will be able to start with us before Amy and Pieter leave and that she will stay until Will and Stewart are firmly in place to ease this transition and provide as much continuity of service as possible.

Given the huge increase in the amount of TB testing that we have been required to undertake over the past months and years, including routine testing, testing to investigate and attempt to control confirmed TB cases and pre-movement testing, we have come to the conclusion that in order to continue to provide the level of service to our clients that we would like to provide and which you deserve, we need to increase our farm department by at least one vet. We have always worked with a policy of sharing the necessary TB testing as evenly as possible between all of our farm vets. With the difficulty, however, being experienced on a national basis in recruiting experienced farm animal vets we have come to the conclusion that it would be beneficial to employ someone whose primary role is TB testing, but who will also be able to help us with other aspects of our role as farm animal vets as the TB testing workload allows. This will, we hope, allow testing to be carried out with greater flexibility and therefore more convenience to you. It will also allow Stephen, who has done an enormous amount of testing over the past years (and who even professes to like the task!) to put his by now considerable skill and experience to better use. Negotiations to fill this TB testing role are currently in an early stage with a Hungarian vet with several years' experience, and we hope these will be fruitful.



Cattle Purchasing Disease Checklist

More and more we are being asked by our clients about improving the health status of their herds. Biosecurity and checks made on incoming stock are a vital part of maintaining a healthy herd in terms of disease status. Along with this newsletter, we have included a Cattle Purchasing Disease Checklist, which Keith was commissioned by DairyCo to write, which we hope you will find useful. The idea would be to use this as a first port of call to assess potential new stock before you buy in. The checklist is designed to steer you in the right direction when thinking about diseases that could be bought-in with new stock. Whilst this form will help to highlight diseases you may or may not have considered could be bought in, it is vital that you then discuss your potential purchase with one of our vets before you buy. We would be more than happy to review the information provided on the checklists and, in consultation with you, to offer the appropriate advice prior to purchase.

Of course, it is important to bear in mind that in order to assess the risks associated with buying in a particular group of animals, it is essential that the health status of your herd is known. Again, our vets are here to help and can provide new herd health plans or update those that have lapsed.

Speak to your vet or call the surgery if you wish to discuss the health of your herd further.



Summer Mastitis

Summer mastitis is a severe mastitis that occurs in heifers and dry cows out at grass. The peak time for this disease is August with incidences rising sharply from mid-July, and falling as September progresses. There are various bacteria thought to be involved and, other than *Strep dysgalactiae*, these are not the organisms commonly associated with mastitis during lactation. Whilst flies are thought to be linked to the spread of this disease, there is only circumstantial evidence of this link. It is likely that bacteria that cause summer mastitis enter the udder as a result of damage to the teat sphincter.

At what stage of the disease clinical cases are identified will very much depend how carefully and frequently dry cows and heifers are inspected out at grass.

The early signs of disease include enlargement of the affected teat and quarter as well as considerable attraction of flies to the udder area. The animal will then progress to showing signs of illness such as separation from the group, reluctance to graze, as well as stiffness in the hind legs. The joints of the hind legs may swell and the animal will lose weight.

If you have an animal that you suspect may have summer mastitis, it is vital that it is seen by a vet. The affected quarter will often not recover its function despite treatment and for this reason preventative measures are vital. Dry cow therapy is the most important strategy to prevent summer mastitis. You should discuss your individual needs with your veterinary surgeon. Treatment of teat sores and lesions will help prevent attraction of flies as well as prudent use of fly repellants. Identifying cases early so that they can be treated promptly will also help reduce spread of this disease.

