DAIRY HERD HEALTH & PRODUCTIVITY SERVICE

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Cows not milking to expectation?

With milk prices on the way up, many are wanting to take advantage. However, we are getting a number of blood tests in to the DHHPS at the moment with reports of herds not milking to expectation. Unfortunately there looks to be no common theme, and no quick fixes…..

With the poor milk price in the spring, many herds reduced feed inputs when the cows were out at grass. Even though the weather has been good for most in October, grazing intakes have not been sufficient to meet the requirements of even relatively modest levels of milk production. Freshly calved cows have struggled during the autumn, losing body condition and failing to hit peak yield. Now that these thin cows are past peak yield, unfortunately there is little that can be done to get these cows back on track. Their milk production is going to suffer for the rest of the lactation.

It has also been a bad summer so far for lungworm, with a number of outbreaks reported (predominantly in suckler herds). If your cows have been out at grass during the summer (including "far off" dry cows) and natural immunity is poor, then outbreaks can occur in adult cows. Coughing cows (especially when they are being gathered for milking) and occasional severe pneumonia cases are suspicious. If in any doubt, get your vet to take samples to check for lungworm infection, and treat appropriately. Liver fluke risk is also predicted to be high this autumn as a result of the summer rainfall. Given the lack of persistence of the currently used flukicidal drugs, dosing cows at drying off may not work if the cows go straight back outside onto infected pasture. Ask your vet to check for fluke.

In cows that have been fully housed onto winter rations, the main issues that we have been seeing in blood tests are problems with energy balance and ERDP intakes. Silage quality has been very variable, and whilst many 1st cut silages have analysed well, later cuts have been poor in terms of energy and crude protein content. This can affect rumen function, and cows not milking to expectation and stiff dung consistency are signs that the rumen is not working as well as it should be. This could be due to either a lack of energy or protein supply to the rumen microbes, and a DHHPS metabolic profile blood test can help to distinguish which of these situations is present.

For those looking to get 2016 maize silage quickly into the ration, feeding new "green" maize that has not had time to fully ferment in the clamp means that it may not feed as well as the analysis might suggest. The amount of starch in maize silage that is degradable in the rumen increases during storage, and so the initial ration will need to be properly balanced to supply sufficient energy to the rumen.

A DHHPS metabolic profile can help get to the bottom of poor performance, and guide you to getting the cows back on track. "Ask the cows"!

Dairy Herd Health and Productivity Service, Division of Veterinary Clinical Sciences, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh, EBVC, Easter Bush, Roslin, Midlothian EH25 9RG

Tel: 0131 651 7474 Fax: 0131 651 7473 DHHPS@ed.ac.uk www.ed.ac.uk/vet/dhhps

Lameness: prevention is always better than cure

As those herds that have been grazing over the summer bring their milking cows in for the winter, now is the time to remember the impact of housing and management on lameness. However increased incidence of lameness is **not** an inevitable consequence of housing cattle.

Even with the current milk price, compromising on scraping out yards and passageways to save on labour costs is a false economy, with standing slurry being one of the main risk factors for the spread of digital dermatitis in housed cattle. As we are all under intense scrutiny concerning our use of antimicrobials, the use of antibiotic footbaths is becoming increasingly difficult to defend. It is therefore more important than ever to focus on excellent foot hygiene as the mainstay of digital dermatitis control.

There are many non-antibiotic footbaths on the market, but unfortunately many have limited evidence to support their use. Indeed, some footbathing regimens have been shown to increase the incidence of digital dermatitis. The use of 5% copper sulphate for at least 4 milkings per week appears to have the best evidence for efficacy, whilst decreasing the concentration or frequency of copper sulphate footbaths is associated with an increase in disease. No product has yet been shown to be superior to copper sulphate; however, there are a couple that have demonstrated similar effectiveness.

There are many risk factors contributing towards the development of claw horn disease in dairy cows, resulting in the lesions that we commonly see such as solar bruising, ulceration of the sole, heel, toe or wall, and white line disease. The relationship between lameness and nutritional status is now well established, with cows that lose body condition known to be at an increased risk of claw horn disease. Given the difficulties we have seen with energy balance in freshly calved cows this autumn, concentrating on cow comfort to maximise lying times, routine foot trimming to maintain foot balance and minimising damage to the foot caused by poorly maintained concrete is going to be particularly important.

Recent work from the University of Nottingham proposes that a vicious cycle of inflammation in the foot results in scarring of the digital cushion and new bone formation on the pedal bone. This alters the anatomy of the foot, and leaves the cow at a permanent increased risk of lameness for the rest of her life. Whilst we always live by the old adage that prevention is better than cure, these new insights further underline the importance of herd and individual cow measures to prevent claw horn disease in milking cows.

This model also adds weight to the case for using non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NDAIDs) in lame cows. This is not just for their pain-relieving properties, but also to reduce inflammation in the foot and hopefully slow or reduce these permanent anatomical changes. Whilst there is limited clinical evidence to support the use of one NSAID over another, remember that only carprofen and ketoprofen have a zero milk withhold!

The DHHPS will be part of the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies stand at Agriscot 2016 on Wednesday 16th November at Ingliston. Please pop along to the stand and say hello if you are coming along to the show.