

Newsletter

August 2019

Currently “enjoying” our hottest day of the year so far, hopefully the crops are recovering from the deluge of rain we’ve had recently. This month Rachel gives us a brief overview of what might be going on in that swelling around the naval of calves and lambs and Mike talks about a recent course he attended about farm data use. As always at this time of year we are on the look out for cases for the farm animal hospital so if you have anything you think is suitable please get in touch.

What’s that swelling?

Swollen navels – we’ve all seen them but they can be caused for a number of different reasons. Below is a quick overview of some of the causes and reasons for these swellings and what we can do about them:



Calf with significant umbilical swelling

Abscess

Very common secondary to navel ill. The umbilicus is likely to be swollen, fluidy or firm, hot and painful on palpation. They can have a discharge if there is an open drainage tract. Infection can also spread into the abdominal cavity and form abscesses inside the abdomen that would not be apparent externally. Calves with infection throughout the abdomen have a much poorer prognosis and are generally a lot sicker than calves where the infection is contained to an abscess at the navel.

Treatment depends on diagnosis. Scanning the swelling will give us an idea of the contents, aspiration of fluid can also help determine what it is. Then either drainage and flushing of the cavity along with antibiotics or surgery can be required depending on the size of the abscess. Sometimes the true extent of infection is not known until surgery.

Prevention comes from good hygiene and navel management at birth along with good colostrum intake. Anecdotally bull calves can be at higher risk given the anatomy and the umbilicus remaining wetter for longer.



Calf with an umbilical abscess, can see the purulent discharge from the drainage tract

Patent urachus

More common in foals than in calves. These typically present with urine dripping from the naval. Would normally require surgery in the hospital setting to ligate the vessel at the bladder.



Tup with extensive umbilical abscess.



Tup undergoing surgery to remove abscess

Hernia

Hernias can be split up into uncomplicated and complicated. Uncomplicated umbilical hernias are normally fairly small, non-painful and contents are able to be pushed easily back into abdomen.

Treatment depends on the size of the abdominal wall defect. Small ones can sometimes be treated by trying to keep the contents out of the ring as it closes, if there is spare skin this can be done with elastrator rings, bigger defects may need surgery to close the defect – something we can do out on farm with the calf anaesthetised or in at the hospital. Generally where we can do the surgery depends on the size of calf, size of defect and how long we think it might take. These defects can be hereditary or as a result of untreated naval ill. If there seems to be a string of similar hernias happening it would be worth checking if they are all from the same bull.

Complicated hernias may contain trapped loops of intestines and can be infected. These hernias are generally painful, and the calves might show systemic signs of depression, colic, ill thrift or diarrhoea. Ultrasonography can be helpful in distinguishing these conditions.

If intestines become trapped, strangulated, in the hernia the passage of ingesta can be prevented or the blood supply can become compromised. In these cases surgical intervention is indicated immediately or euthanasia is required.

So next time you have a calf or lamb with a swelling... have a feel, decide how sick the animal is, give us a call and we can come out and bring the scanner to take a closer look. Surgery wise we are always happy to have cases in at the hospital or to come out and perform simple surgery's on farm if the cases are suitable.

What to do with data

Mike, Alex and Amy attended a training course in Cumbria at the start of July, discussing how EID-based technology and software can be used to target and monitor flock health interventions. The course included speakers from DataMars (formerly Tru-Test), Border Software and Shearwell Data, and included a visit where they were able to see the equipment in action and chat to the farmer about how he incorporates it into his pedigree Lleyn system. In addition, there was an interesting case-study from a vet based in County Durham who used the data from her husband's flock of 600 Mules to help drive down lameness cases from 15% of ewes per year to under 2% in just 3 years.

Some of our clients are already using equipment to target worm treatments in lambs based on weight gain, amongst other uses. If you are interested in finding out more about how new technology can improve farm efficiency, let us know and we could arrange a local farm visit soon.