Avoiding Milk Fever

Milk fever continues to be a common and costly disease issue on many dairy farms. In many cases the main risk factor is grass availability for dry cows, late season grazing in particular, due to the high calcium but low magnesium content of the grass. Consequently we are coming to the time of year where the incidence of milk fever peaks on many farms.

It is well documented that good management of the transition period for the dry cow is essential for a healthy and productive milking cow and that ideally they should be housed to ensure full control of their diet. However, what if that is not practical for your farm!

If your dry cows are grazing, what can you do to minimise the risk of hypocalcaemia and its associated diseases such as dystocia, retained foetal membranes, metritis and displaced abomasums?

The main mineral objectives for a dry cow ration are to keep calcium, phosphorus and potassium low and magnesium supplementation high. This is necessary to prime the cow’s body into mobilising her calcium reserves ready for when she calves and her demand for calcium more than doubles in a few hours.

Practical tips for grazing dry cows:

• Cows in the first month of the dry period can generally cope with a higher level of grass intake than those closer to calving, but it is still recommended to keep them on the lowest quality pasture available. Use electric fences to limit grass access if necessary to control intakes.

• If possible, manage cows off grass for the last 3 weeks of the dry period

• Tight stocking of 8-12 cows per hectare and sward height <7cm (if can’t see the cows hooves above the grass then it is too long). Just picking at grass and filling up on other forage BUT NOT GRASS SILAGE

• Designated smaller old ley paddocks for dry cows that are not fertilised with slurry or potash, which are high in potassium

• Magnesium supplementation in the form of concentrates, bullets, licks and/or in water (beware of small water troughs and one or two cows emptying them). Cows need 80g/day of magnesium chloride

• Reduce DCAB by giving maize silage/whole crop as buffer feed and balance with other feedstuffs e.g. cereals, rape, sugar beet pulp and straw

• Check phosphorus concentration is not >0.5% as high levels will reduce vitamin D activation and calcium absorption

• Give Bovikalc boluses to all at risk cows at calving (3rd lactation and over)

• Monitor cows on suitable transition diet by blood sampling cows within 48 hours of calving to check calcium levels

• DON’T feed milking cow ration mixed with straw to dry cows as calcium levels are likely to be TOO HIGH!
Ploughing match

The Cheshire ploughing match is being held on Wednesday 24 September 2014 at Ashley Hall Farm, Hale, Altrincham, WA14 3QA. We will be attending and providing refreshments for our clients. Come and see us to have a chat, a beef butty and a piece of cake! Let’s hope for some good weather too.

FOOT TRIMMING

Contact Steve Austin
01565 723036

Visit per cow
£12 – 4 feet £10 – 2 feet
Block – £9.50
Bandage – £2.50
No Call out fee for 12 or more cows

FREEZE BRANDING

Contact Malcolm Pheasant
01565 723036

Prices for 3 digits
Up to 15 Cows – £80
15 – 50 Cows – £4.50 per cow
50+ cows £4 per cow
Every extra digit £1 per cow. Both sides +75%

WILLOWS FARM ANIMAL VETERINARY PRACTICE

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Research Day
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By kind permission of Alistair and Gill Cliff

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To reserve a place call 07792 289386
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Find out more
www.dairyco.org.uk/cheshireresearchday2014

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