FARM NEWSLETTER JUNE 2016

THE NEWSLETTER OF WILLOWS FARM ANIMAL VETERINARY PRACTICE

Responsible use of medicines

The use of veterinary medicines, in particular antimicrobial drugs (antibiotics), in farm animals is coming under heavy scrutiny due to the alarming increase in the incidence of antimicrobial resistance being reported in human patients by doctors.

Antimicrobial resistance occurs when bacteria cease to be killed by antibiotics. The mechanisms by which resistance develops are complicated, however there is growing evidence to suggest that the use of antibiotics in farm animals may be a contributing factor. At present it is estimated that between 70‐80% of all antibiotics sold worldwide are used in livestock industries and in the pig and poultry sectors in particular. Although antimicrobials are vital for the treatment and prevention of bacterial disease in livestock some are administered to animals in feed and water to increase production. This has given the industry a bad name, and made it the focus of intense scientific and media pressure.

Governments in several European countries have responded to this pressure by imposing strict regulations on how vets and farmers use antimicrobials. Supermarkets and milk processors are also increasingly aware of the issue and putting pressure on producers to reduce the amount of antimicrobials used. In addition, a list of critically important antimicrobials has been produced which should only be used when no alternative therapy is available.

A recent survey undertaken by a student at the Royal Veterinary College in London on the use of BVD vaccine by UK farmers provides us with some food for thought:

• 21% of respondents administered the incorrect dose or used an inappropriate route
• 48% of respondents administered the two doses of a primary course at incorrect intervals
• only 24% of respondents gave the primary vaccination course at the appropriate time
• only 10% of respondents kept vaccine cool during transport, and 33% during usage
• many respondents kept open bottles of vaccine for more than the recommended 10 hours

If we cannot demonstrate that we are able to control how medicines are used in livestock farming as an industry things will have to change. It is extremely important that we are all (vets and farmers) seen to be using medicines responsibly so that we retain the right to prescribe and dispense medicines in the future. We have developed a number of workshops around the safe and proper use of medicines on farm. These can be farm specific and run for you on your farm for your team. For further information about this speak to your vet or go to the RUMA (responsible use of medicines in agriculture alliance) website.

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Parasite control

Parasite forecasts continue to show high risk levels for blow fly strike, parasitic gastro-enteritis (gutworm) and lung worm. All of these conditions pose both health and welfare problems and robust control plans should be in place to reduce the risk to livestock. Regular faecal egg counts are an effective way of monitoring the worm burden in stock to establish if treatment is required. Faecal egg counts after treatment also help identify resistance issues.

Gutworm treatment at calving can help to overcome the ‘energy gap’ experienced by newly calved cows and ensure that they make the best of grass. The energy gap is the difference between the energy required for milk production and that produced from feed intake; it occurs during the first 6-10 weeks after calving. If appetite is reduced at this critical time and food intake is compromised, the energy gap will increase, causing the cow to milk off her back and lose significant body condition. If this continues for a prolonged period, both the cow’s milk production and her fertility can be significantly affected. Adult cows treated with Eprinex® have been shown to graze for almost an hour more than untreated cows. Worming cows can therefore directly improve appetite and help to reduce the energy gap.

Over the last decade, numerous studies involving over 8,000 cows and heifers have clearly demonstrated that removing gutworms in the milking cow through worming with Eprinex® can improve milk yield. Indeed the response to treatment in terms of increased milk yield can be as much as 2.2 litres per cow per day. A smaller number of studies have shown that fertility can also be improved by worming, with treated animals demonstrating a 13 day shorter calving to conception interval and a 20% higher conception rate at first service. If a cow gives an extra 2.2 litres for every day of lactation, then assuming a 305 day lactation period, that’s an extra 671 litres per year. This equates to around £195 per cow per year at £0.29 per litre and that’s not accounting for any fertility benefits. On the basis of these additional returns farmers not currently worming their cows are advised to do so, to remove damaging gutworms, improve performance and help herds deliver more. Eprinex® is an ideal treatment at this time as it has a zero milk withhold, providing the ability to treat cows at any stage of lactation without the worry of lost milk sales. It also treats lungworm and is a proven product with more than a decade of successful use by dairy farmers.