Summer mastitis, or ‘August Bag’, is a common problem in the UK in grazing animals. As the name suggests, it usually occurs in the summer months from June to September. As the number of flies increases so the risk also increases. Unsurprisingly, cases will often be found in animals in fields with water course and trees, which provide a good environment for the flies.

Summer mastitis is an acute disease of the non-lactating udder and is common in both dairy and beef cattle. Dry cows and heifers are particularly susceptible, but calves can also be affected. The primary causative agent is a bacterium known as Trueperella Pyogenes, but mixed infections can also occur. Affected animals will suffer acutely, with a hard, hot and painfully swollen udder. They will often be separated away from the rest of the group, off their feed and have a significantly raised temperature. They can also show hind limb lameness, especially on the affected side. Pus-like secretions, which may be tinged with blood, can be seen discharging from the affected teat. Cows can die from septicemia as a consequence of summer mastitis.

Whilst the typical presentation is relatively simple, it is also worth considering heifers that calve down with a ‘blind quarter’ may have previously suffered from summer mastitis, which went undetected.

Rapid treatment is essential to save affected animals, although diseased quarters may never recover. Regular stripping of the affected quarter is required to remove the infected material. It should be noted that the discharge is infectious to other animals so should be collected in a bucket. Treatment should involve both antibiotics and anti-inflammatories.

It is important that measures are taken to prevent summer mastitis creating widespread issues on your farm, as recovery rates in affected animals are low. Protection of the udder is important by using a teat sealant, ensure a strict hygiene protocol is followed otherwise a severe mastitis may follow. It is wise to keep susceptible animals away from known high-risk fields during the summer months. Long acting fly pour-on treatments are also recommended to reduce the chances both of infection and transmission to other animals. There are, however, no sebaceous glands on the udder so direct application of the fly pour-on to the udder is recommended as well as on the back of the cow as normal.
Milk fever risk

The most common complication of managing pre-calving cows on grass based diets is milk fever. Even when a degree of feed supplementation or mineral supplementation is provided the risk of milk fever remains high on many units especially following periods of rapid grass growth.

At calving the calcium requirement of a dairy cow increases massively with the onset of milk production. To supply this demand she not only absorbs calcium from her diet but she also requires calcium mobilised from her bones which act as a reserve. We tend to see more milk fever in older cows as their bones are harder and the calcium is less readily available. In order to get the calcium moving, cows need a diet which is high in magnesium and low in calcium pre-calving which is where having a diet based on grass can cause problems.

Many diets which are grass based have a high level of potash which limits the absorption of magnesium. Potash levels are particularly high in heavily stocked pastures and those that have had slurry applied. The risk of milk fever can be reduced by avoiding these high potash forages and high risk pastures. Supplemneting magnesium is also helpful in this period, this can be done by a variety of mechanisms such as magnesium boluses, magnesium salts added to feed or water supplies and high magnesium minerals/ dry cow concentrates. The risk of milk fever can be further reduced by giving calcium boluses at the point of calving and in the first 24 hours after calving. For more specific advice on reducing the risk of milk fever in your herd speak to any of the vets.