

## **Vet Watch**

### **Holstein Journal – October 2007**

In the first of a new series, which will involve vets from around the country, we hear from Rob Drysdale about a few issues that we should be aware of as we head towards Autumn and Winter with our Holstein herds.

*Rob Drysdale is founder and Director of Westpoint Veterinary Group, one of the largest farm animal practices in the UK offering national consultancy to herds from Cornwall to Scotland. Rob specialises in dairy herd health with his particular interests in mastitis and milk quality, dry periods and calf health working with herds across the country.*

#### **Winter housing thoughts**

Winter housing leads to issues for dairy farmers. I have been lucky enough to work in practices across the UK and, although the date for housing depends on how far north the farm is, the problems are still the same.

Things to think about this year include:

- Extended grazing and maintaining growth rates in youngstock. Will autumn grass alone keep growth rates above target? Keeping heifers growing toward bulling weight, and after, can be difficult and any lost weights will see the date to first calving extended. This means lost potential lifetime production for the animal and overall profitability.
- Think about gut and lungworm controls. The wet, mild summer and early autumn has seen husk become a sudden problem on some units. Take care with grazing animals, even mild lung damage could reduce future production.
- Don't forget cows as they too can be affected by high worm burdens and lungworm, especially on units that have ceased Huskvac use in recent years.
- Vaccinations can be used effectively to reduce pneumonia but have you considered boosters for stock pre-housing? Pneumonia is now an issue on many units. Housing heifers pre-calving presents an excellent opportunity to vaccinate replacements. What about the cows?

#### **Disease control and biosecurity**

Disease control works at animal, farm and country levels with biosecurity vital at all these points. After the recent Foot and Mouth scare, I will not get into the country level, but at farm level there is a lot that you can do.

The herd health plan (HHP) should be seen as a working document. I would like farmers to see the process as health planning: a verb, doing word, with farmers working with their staff and vet team to produce a series of protocols to better animal health.

In the pedigree world this is a vital process for herd improvement and the saleability of stock: know your disease status and then decide if it is cost effective to control it.

IBR (Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis) is a good example of a disease that can cause serious disease in younger animals, but is often present across a dairy unit. Since IBR is actually Bovine Herpes Virus-1, once an animal is infected it is potentially a carrier for life.

Many farms have endemic IBR in the herd yet do not vaccinate – why? Cost you all say – but at £4 per head per year this is insignificant compared to the losses that can follow even a mild IBR outbreak. IBR does not just cause pneumonia in calves; it has now been recognised as a significant sub-clinical disease in milking cows with abortions, reduced fertility and milk drop the main signs. If you are IBR free why run the risk of buying stock without checking with your vet?

### **A recurring problem**

Hardware disease – no, not some problem in B&Q, but the syndrome recognised when wires and other metallic objects are in a cow's stomach. A recent report in the veterinary press has stimulated debate about "hardware disease" as an increasing risk on many UK dairy units.

Cattle rations have changed, with many farms feeding TMR using bought-in straights and a mixer wagon. The modern cow "hoovers" up feed, eating almost anything presented in the TMR. This could include nails, even tyre wire fragments. Perhaps this is the reason we see so many "wire" cases?

When wire enters the stomach it invariably ends up in the reticulum (second stomach) to sit only inches from the liver, spleen, heart and lungs. The wire then becomes trapped in the honeycomb lining of the stomach, where the motion of the stomach then pushes it through towards the vital organs.

At Westpoint we have noted over 10% of all cows examined at *post mortem* had wires present in the stomach. Many of these cows had been culled due to poor performance or unexplained illness.

Prevention is difficult: keeping cattle away from wires means in the feed, removing tyres from the unit and taking great care when disposing of rubbish. Another way to help reduce the problem is to place a magnet inside the cow's stomach.

I have recently tried some new magnets from the USA that allow animals from 150kg and upwards to be bloused. It is much easier to bolus a young heifer rather than a fully grown cow. Just something to think about.

For more details see [www.westpointfarmvets.co.uk](http://www.westpointfarmvets.co.uk) or call the practice 01306 628086.

Pictures;

- First is a magnet showing taken from a cow's stomach at PM showing nails and other metallic objects caught in it.
- Second is a cow's lungs and heart showing a tyre wire in situ that was working its way towards the heart.