



HALE VETERINARY GROUP

FARM ANIMAL NEWSLETTER MARCH 2010



First of all, we are sorry to report that Rebecca will be leaving us in May as she heads for pastures new in Somerset. She will be greatly missed and we wish her all the best for the future.

CALF MANAGEMENT

The Spring calving season is upon us so we thought a section on calf management would be useful. Good calf management optimises the health and future productivity of animals.

Management begins before the calf is even born. Cows should calve in clean conditions to minimise the risk of disease transmission to calves after birth. After birth calves' navels should be dipped in iodine solution to reduce the risk of infection entering resulting in navel/joint ill. Adequate intake of good quality colostrum is essential to ensure passive transfer of immunity from mother to calf, which protects the calf from infection in the first weeks of life. Calves should receive 2 litres of colostrum in the first 6 hours of life and then another 2 litres in the next 6 hours – ideally by sucking the mother, but if this is not possible by bottle or oesophageal feeder. Speak to one of our farm animal vets if you are concerned about failure of passive transfer of immunity on your farm – we can easily assess it using a blood test.

Good calf housing is important in minimising the risk of disease. Calves should be reared in groups of similar age and size. Overstocking must be avoided. Good hygiene and ventilation are also important.

If calves are removed from their mothers after birth they should be fed milk at regular time intervals and should have access to water, early weaning concentrate and hay – this is important for rumen development. Growth rates can be monitored by weighing calves on a regular basis.

Calves should be checked at least twice a day to ensure diseases (e.g. scour and pneumonia) are detected as soon as possible allowing rapid treatment with a better prognosis. Stressful procedures (e.g. disbudding/castration and weaning) should not be carried out all at once as stress can suppress the immune system predisposing calves to infection.

GRASS STAGGERS

Turn-out is approaching and farmers should be aware of grass staggers (hypomagnesaemia), especially on spring pastures treated with potassium fertiliser after periods of stress (e.g. bad weather). Animals with grass staggers may have a “staggering” gait or tremors, although are frequently found dead with the ground around them torn up. Treatment involves administering magnesium sulphate **under the skin** and prevention involves magnesium supplementation, e.g. magnesium chloride in drinking water.

LAMB TAIL DOCKING

DEFRA is concerned that sheep owners are docking lambs' tails too short, predisposing them to fly strike resulting in poor health and welfare. Lambs' tails should be long enough to cover the vulva in females and the anus in males after docking. Failure to comply with these regulations could result in prosecution or withholding payments due under the Single Payment Scheme. If you are unsure about docking your lambs' tails speak to one of our farm animal vets for advice.

HVG HEALTH WATCH

Left displaced abomasum and poor fertility performance continued to be a problem in March.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE THIS NEWSLETTER/OTHER UPDATES BY E-MAIL PLEASE E-MAIL US AT: halehealthyherdinitiative@hotmail.co.uk