



SPRING UPDATE

# FARM FIRST NEWSLETTER



APRIL 2021



## GETTING CALVES TO SUCK

There are few things more frustrating than an otherwise seemingly- healthy calf that just refuses to suck! Even more so if you had the vet to help with a difficult calving or caesarean section.... and the calf comes out alive to everyone's relief, but then seems intent on starving itself for no good reason. There are several different reasons why calves will not/cannot suck, here are some of the main ones:

- Congenital abnormalities which make sucking very difficult, such as a cleft palate.
- Premature calves with immature lungs struggle to oxygenate their tissues and get rid of carbon dioxide. This results in a condition called acidosis which diminishes the suck reflex and impairs absorption of the antibodies in colostrum.
- Calves that experience a difficult/prolonged birth (typically large calves requiring assisted calvings) can also end up with acidosis if the umbilical cord is compressed/ruptured prematurely
- Calves with generally reduced vigour due to poor cow nutrition prior to calving and/or a selenium deficiency.
- Scouring calves which end up with metabolic acidosis due to lactic acid formation: acidosis diminishes suck reflex, plus sick calves often have a reduced appetite.
- Calves that have sucked from the cow and which are subsequently taken off the cow and are refusing to drink from a plastic teat/bucket.

So, what is the answer? Knowing the cause is essential. For the calves that have no suck reflex due to acidosis, veterinary treatment is needed, involving administration of sodium bicarbonate and/or oral or intravenous fluids. An acidotic new- born calf will be slower to sit itself up and lift its head. Try not to leave them lying on their side as this further reduces oxygenation of the lower lung. Ensure any mucus is removed from their airways, and if they are not sitting up unaided fifteen minutes after birth, consider speaking to your vet if you have not done so already.

For weak, deficient calves: supplementation with selenium, vitamin E and anything else they are lacking should help.

If you are getting a lot of generally weak calves, speak to your vet about taking some samples to check for deficiencies, so that the cows' diet can be adjusted accordingly.

For older scouring calves, mild cases may be resolved with oral fluids, but if this does not work and the suck reflex does not return, again these calves need veterinary attention.

For the calves that genuinely have little wrong with them, except they do not want to drink from a rubber teat/bucket, perseverance and patience are key. If there is nothing clinically wrong with them, they will drink eventually. Flavouring the teat as with chocolate spread or honey can help in some cases and as will trying different sizes and shapes of teat.

**For more advice on  
this and other calving  
issues call us on  
01873 840167**



## BOTULISM

Is caused by Clostridium botulinum bacteria that produce toxins under certain environmental conditions. C. botulinum bacteria are commonly found in the environment and will grow to high levels in decaying organic matter including animal and bird carcasses. It is believed that contamination of broiler litter with the carcasses of chickens that have died, from various causes during production, can render the litter dangerous for ruminants. Even small fragments of carcasses transferred onto pasture by scavenger animals, such as foxes, dogs or crows may pose a risk to grazing ruminants. Scavengers may gain access to this material during storage or following spreading on land. While the Animal By-Products (Enforcement) Regulations (NI) 2011 permits the spreading on land of poultry litter, the spreading of litter contaminated by carcasses is an offence.

Cattle and sheep of all ages are susceptible to botulism, which is characterised by a progressive muscle weakness (paralysis). Affected animals may be weak, stagger about, or go down. Cattle characteristically display flaccid paralysis and occasionally protrusion of the tongue. Signs in sheep and goats are similar to cattle but protrusion of the tongue may not be as obvious. In most cases the disease is fatal although some animals may recover.

In many cases of botulism euthanasia is justified on welfare grounds.

Poultry litter should not be spread on agricultural land that is to be grazed, or from which silage or hay is to be harvested, in the same year. Spreading litter on a windy day may also pose a risk of contaminating adjacent fields. Any animal or bird carcasses, or portions of carcasses, visible on pasture or in livestock houses, should be promptly removed.

## NEMATODIROSIS – A RISK TO YOUR GROWING LAMBS

Unlike most PGE-causing roundworms, Nematodirus battus infections pass directly from one season's lambs to the next. This is due to the specific development requirements of eggs at pasture, which survive on pastures over winter to develop and emerge as infective larvae the following spring. Under optimal conditions, eggs develop more rapidly and hatch earlier in the grazing season, and in larger numbers. Under such circumstances, pastures can become highly infective in a short space of time and, if this mass emergence or "peak hatch" occurs at a time when lambs are starting to graze extensively can lead to widespread and severe disease. It is therefore important to identify potentially contaminated pastures and avoid grazing lambs on these during peak risk periods for disease. SCOPS produces a risk forecast for Nematodirus based on local climatic conditions to help predict when "peak hatch" periods are likely to occur: Our area is at moderate risk at the moment.

The treatment of choice for Nematodirus is a white drench. We have Endospec 2.5% in stock which is ideal for treating young lambs and very reasonably priced at £29.29 + VAT for 2.5 litre if you pay at the time. Please note that we do not advise using this product to worm sheep later in the year, although it can be used for treating adult liver fluke. This is because there are widespread resistance issues to the worms which appear later in the summer. Coccidiosis is another parasite that can cause scour in this age of lambs and can be diagnosed using the faecal egg counts. If you have any concerns about scour or deaths in your lambs please get in touch.



**PLEASE REMEMBER TO PRE  
ORDER YOUR DRUGS VIA  
TELEPHONE  
OPEN SATURDAY MORNING  
8.30AM - 12.30PM**

## JOKE

A lady entered the dentists surgery in an obvious state of agitation. The dentist tried to calm her down assuring her that he would do nothing to hurt her. She sat down in the chair and started fidgeting nervously as the dentist began sterilizing all the required equipment. When he asked her to open her mouth, she screamed.

So he tried to calm her down again even though he was losing patience.

Almost immediately the lady threw a hysterical fit, then realizing that the dentist had begun glaring at her, she said, "Oh doctor, I'm so nervous. I hate dentists. Why, I think I'd rather have a baby than have a tooth drilled." Replied the dentist - "Well Miss, better make up your mind fast so that I can adjust the chair accordingly".