Vet Viewpoint

A regional round-up of key veterinary issues

TIM SCRIVENER

Heat stress in dairy cows can affect milk production and conception rates

John Goodson

Larkmead Veterinary Group
Oxfordshire

* With summer approaching and temperatures on the rise, our thoughts turn to heat stress.

This can be a key economic loss, especially in dairy cattle, with reduced milk production, decreased conception rates and increased early embryonic loss. Calf weight gain and bull fertility may also be impaired.

Cattle ideally like being in environmental temperatures of 4-24C.

Signs of heat stress include decreased dry matter intake, increased rectal temperature (>39.4C), a respiratory rate of more than 80 breaths/minute, increased standing time to expose more skin surface and grouping in shady areas.

At times of peak risk, try to provide as much air circulation and shade as possible. If available, use sprinklers and make sure there is plentiful access to water and bias feeding to the afternoon.

Bridget Taylor

Wright & Morten
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* The scour pathogen Cryptosporidium parvum presents a serious, intractable risk to the health of young calves.

We are seeing a rise in disease relating to this single-celled protozoan parasite across farms – many of which are operating good hygiene practices.

An infected calf can shed up to 10bn cryptosporidium oocysts in seven to 10 days. Only five oocysts are needed for infection, which explains why the parasite spreads even when hygiene is relatively good.

Oocysts are resistant to most disinfectants and can survive in a cool, moist environment for many months.

Spring block-calving herds can now clean out their calving and calf accommodation, then steam clean it.

All affected farms should consult their vet to confirm diagnosis and develop a control plan, possibly involving preventive medication.

Jenny Bellini

Friars Moor Veterinary Clinic
Dorset

* June may seem like a strange month to start talking about calf pneumonia, but for block calvers now is the time to think ahead to prevent cases once calving starts again.

Calf pneumonia has a major effect on your replacement heifers' growth rates and future productivity.

Each case is estimated to have a direct cost of £43, with further losses as heifers calve later, produce less milk in their lifetime and die sooner.

Now is a good time to take blood samples from heifers older than three months to identify which pneumonia pathogens are on your farm. Prevention and treatment plans can then be tailored specific to your farm.

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