CHRIS PRICE

Cattle vet Chris Price, from the Wiltshire-based XL Vet Group's Drove Veterinary Hospital, takes a timely look at health and welfare issues effecting UK dairy herds. In this issue he explains why clostridial disease could be a significant problem this spring and summer.

Clostridial disease could be more prevalent this grazing season

Sudden-death syndrome

Clostridial disease, caused by the clostridial group of bacteria, is responsible for a range of different conditions in cattle, which include blackleg, malignant oedema, tetanus and botulism. The result is often sudden death and there may well be an increased incidence this coming grazing season as many grazing leys under go renovation, following the excessively wet conditions in 2012.

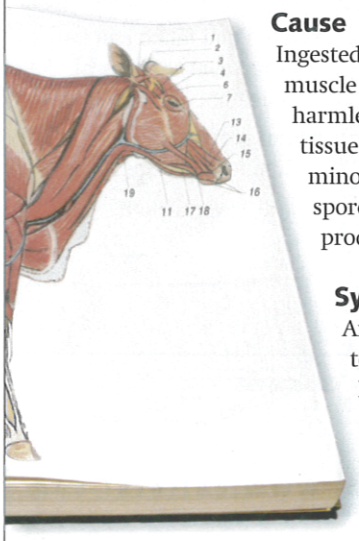
Where outbreaks occur there is usually a history of soil disturbance within the area that is being grazed, such as soil being moved during building projects or ditches being cleared. But even excessively poached or sub-soiled land could pose a risk.

The most recent outbreak that I saw was on a unit that was building a new shed and had piled up a mound of soil in a field where young stock were grazing. They lost seven heifers out of a group of 30. Both tragic and costly.

Too many producers put the sudden death of young stock down to 'just one of those things' but a post-mortem could well reveal that it's the result of clostridial disease. And that's something that could be prevented with a cost-effective vaccination programme.

Producers who do vaccinate tend do so with hindsight after losing cattle to the disease. If they know they've had losses due to clostridial disease, they're in a good position to decide whether to vaccinate against it or not. At just £1 per head for the initial two-dose immunisation, it's extremely cost effective.

The encyclopaedia **Clostridial disease**



Cause

Ingested bacterial spores localise into the muscle tissues where they reside harmlessly until a change in the local tissue conditions, such as bruising or a minor wound, causes activation of the spores. Bacteria multiply rapidly and produce a range of toxins.

Symptoms

An affected animal may be noted to be acutely depressed and often lame, if observed early after the onset of disease signs.

However the most common presentation is as a sudden death.

Treatment

Very early treatment is vital if it's to be effective. High doses of intravenous penicillin, anti-inflammatories and possibly surgical removal of dead or damaged tissue (if apparent) may be successful in some instances.

Prevention

Stock can be vaccinated prior to turnout in the spring. There are a range of inexpensive commercially available vaccines that are suitable for this. Single strain vaccines and multivalent products, to cover a more complete range of the commonly encountered Clostridial bacterial strains, are available.

While clostridial vaccination is considered as a vital and routine part of sheep flock management, it is surprising that vaccination is not more widely practiced in cattle, particularly when infection usually results in death.