

Early Lactation Therapy – a word from the vet

Last month we learnt how the newly introduced ELT principle could change mastitis management on farm. ELT is a new protocol developed with the help of leading UK vets to assist with the day-to-day management of mastitis. Here Tom Clarke, of Synergy Farm Health in Dorset, spends some time discussing Step 3.

ELT process

ELT is a simple three-step process:

1. Identify animals at high risk of developing mastitis
2. Monitor high risk animals and their records
3. Early identification of clinical cases and early appropriate treatment.

Overall, ELT aims to help maximise cure rates, minimise mastitis recurrence rates and deliver a rapid return to acceptable cell counts and, hence, saleable milk.

Step 3: Treat early and appropriately

Following the first two steps of the ELT principles should naturally lead to early detection of clinical mastitis cases. This allows the prompt and appropriate treatment of such cases, leading to many likely benefits:

- Reduce the severity of the infection.
- Improve cure rates and reduce recurrence rates.
- Reduce milk yield loss.
- Improve chances of a quick return to good health and acceptable SCC.
- Assist overall management of bulk milk SCC.

Treat appropriately

Treating each case in the most appropriate way is the starting point to work towards a good cow response and, therefore, cure. Ideally, every herd should have a farm-specific mastitis treatment protocol designed to target the most common types of mastitis organism identified in that herd.

Bacteriology and the vet's knowledge of risk factors on farm should be used to formulate the protocols. The type of bacteria present on farm will dictate some of the other management strategies, as well as treatment choice and length of therapy required.

We know those farms which have invested time in working with their vet to understand which group of bacteria

are the predominant problem in their herd arrive at more tailored treatment and management regimes; both factors which improve mastitis management.

Treat carefully

It is a constant surprise how common it is for an udder infection to be linked to poor operator hygiene or infusion techniques. Dairy cows are valuable animals and paying attention to detail when milking and treating cows is common sense. It is important to ensure anyone who may need to administer treatments for mastitis is trained and follows guidance:

- Milkers should have sufficient time to be hygienic eg wearing new gloves.
- Often overlooked but very important is to thoroughly disinfect the teat end with teat spray followed by alcohol wipes or soaked cotton wool prior to inserting the tube.
- Intramammary product should always be infused using the 'partial insertion' technique to minimise the risk of trauma to the teat canal. The intramammary tube is only partially inserted 2-3mm into the teat canal. Teat canal damage can render the teat more susceptible to future mastitis infections.

If there is any question of systemic involvement, parlour workers should also be trained to take the cow's temperature with a view to administering additional antibiotics or NSAIDs, again according to a veterinary developed protocol.

Repeat infections are an all-too-common challenge for producers, but it may not necessarily be the choice of antibiotic so much as other cow factors, high environmental challenge, inadequate parlour routine or milking machine issues. Simply reaching for a different tube is unlikely to solve the issue.

Records & target setting

Identifying cases in need of treatment and acting accordingly is of great

importance, but without recording there is no measurement of success (or failure). Analysing records with your vet will help pinpoint areas or times of the year when mastitis occurs and get closer to solving the problem.

Analysis of cure rates is important to assess treatment protocols. Targets should be set depending on farm history and predominant type of mastitis in the herd. Cure rate analysis also needs to take into account whether cows are being treated for clinical mastitis or high cell counts.

By treating carefully and appropriately at all times, setting targets and reviewing performance alongside your vet, the herd's response to therapy and management protocols can be reviewed and monitored.

Top tips

1. Farm specific mastitis treatment protocol based on: Bacteriology and the vet's knowledge of the risk factors on the farm
2. Clear instructions on how to administer intramammary treatments
3. Training of parlour workers to identify and grade mastitis and taking rectal temperatures
4. Record every clinical case, high cell count as well as treatment given
5. Analyse cure rates to assess treatment protocols.

Why Early Lactation Therapy?

1. Cows in early lactation are at greater risk of developing mastitis
2. To manage mastitis on farm, all people milking cows need to be following the same protocol, which has to be simple
3. Regular protocol updating and staff training are key to deliver a more consistent approach to mastitis management
4. The ELT campaign gives vets the opportunity to start the discussion on mastitis management in less proactive dairies
5. Assessing treatment protocols and promoting responsible use of antimicrobials on farms.

How to give treatment

- Record the mastitis case and mark cow as treated
- Make sure the quarter is empty
- Disinfect the teat
- Carefully insert the mastitis tube
- Dip or spray teat after treatment
- Make sure you cover at least two thirds of the teat length