

Sponsored survey

The 2012 National Pneumonia Survey, sponsored by Bovilis® Bovipast RSP and overseen by XL Vets farm animal practice Lambert, Leonard and May, highlights the impact this disease has on UK dairy and beef units.

Proactive approach needed to improve pneumonia management

There was a good response to the annual survey, with 374 participants responsible for rearing around 40,000 calves annually answering questions on pneumonia incidence, animals affected and disease management.

Survey co-ordinator James Allcock from Lambert, Leonard and May, says: "As in previous years, the survey findings show virtually every cattle farmer has had to cope with some level of disease incidence, although fewer than 10 per cent (8.5 per cent) of farmers who responded to the survey claimed to have never seen pneumonia in their calves. And, consistent with the 2011 results, more than half of farmers typically see the disease in more than 5% of their youngstock."

Most disease is seen in relatively young calves, with just under 60 per cent (55.4 per cent) of the survey sample saying pneumonia mainly affects calves under two months old. Just under one in three cases are in animals between two and six months of age. And only 4 per cent of farmers had seen the disease in stock older than six months of age. (Fig 1).

"Despite the widespread nature of this debilitating and costly disease – and the availability of a range of very effective vaccines – it is still somewhat surprising that only a relatively few number of farmers ask their vet to become proactively involved in diagnostic work," says Mr Allcock.

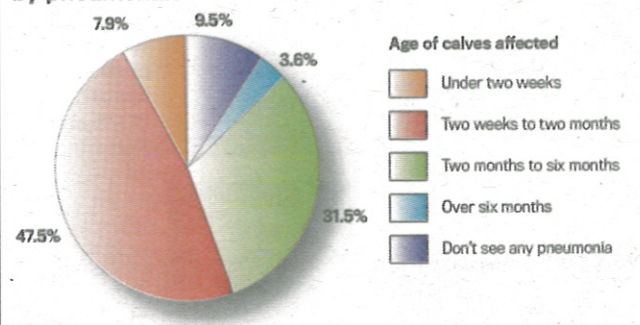
Proactivity

"Less than a third say they have involved their vet in this area and this lack of proactivity is reflected in the numbers of farmers vaccinating against the disease. Disappointingly, only 29.2 per cent of farmers are employing vaccination as part of their disease management strategy.

"Interestingly though, when asked what causes the disease, most farmers (87.8 per cent) have a sound appreciation of the origins of pneumonia, correctly telling us pneumonia occurs when viruses, bacteria and environmental factors interact. It is because of this complex interaction and the immune status of the animal – often unique to individual units – that it really pays to involve your vet in a proactive disease management approach," he stresses.

Mr Allcock says typically a

Figure 1: At what age are your calves usually affected by pneumonia?



number of pathogens are at the root of many pneumonia problems. "Viruses may cause serious disease on their own or may weaken a calf's natural defences, allowing bacterial infections to take hold," he says, "but while some bacteria are almost invariably present as a result of secondary infections, the cause of most pneumonia outbreaks is very difficult to pinpoint."

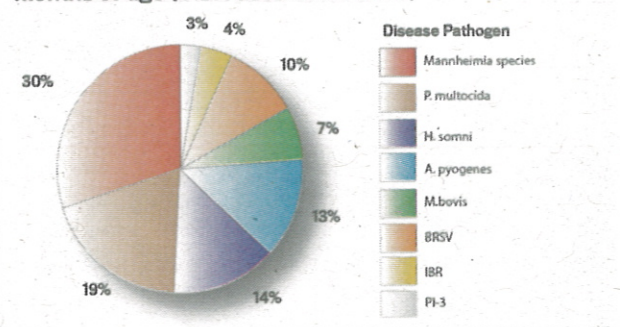
Analysis of SAC and VLA diagnostic data (2005-2010) by MSD Animal Health shows Mannheimia (Pasteurella) bacteria are present in around a third of outbreaks in calves under three months old.

Mannheimia species were found to be present in 30 per cent of disease outbreaks in this age group. M.haemolytica was by far the most dominant pathogen implicated. Pasteurella multocida was present in 19 per cent of diagnostic samples, Histophilus somni in 14 per cent and Mycoplasma bovis in only 7 per cent. (Fig 2).

Preventative

Against this diagnostic background, Mr Allcock says a preventative approach involving broad spectrum vaccination and good management are the key to controlling the risk factors which increase the chance of the

Figure 2: Pneumonia outbreaks in calves under three months of age (VIDA data: 2005-2010)



disease hitting your unit.

"There are a number of multi-valent vaccines available, covering the major viral pneumonia causes, but in our experience pasteurilla bacteria – such as M.haemolytica – do play a significant role in the disease complex. When we send in diagnostic samples, results usually show the presence of bacteria. Consequently, when you are unsure of the particular challenge on a unit it often makes sense to use a vaccine such as Bovilis® Bovipast RSP which offers protection against the key viral and bacterial (M.haemolytica) pathogens implicated in the disease. But remember pneumonia vaccines are

only an aid to the control of disease and without good stock and environmental risk factor management, vaccination will struggle to prevent disease alone."

Inevitably therefore, farmers will always have to treat some animals for pneumonia. "When treating clinically sick calves we would recommend using a combination antibiotic/anti-inflammatory product," he says.

"And where a number of calves in a pen are showing clinical disease signs, because of the infection pressure it's worth consulting your vet about the value of long-acting metaphylactic (batch) antibiotic treatment."