

the vet

So near and yet so far



By Andy Cant
Northvet Veterinary Group

In the spring calving suckler herd it is this time of year we start to see abortions getting reported and sure enough this year is no different. It is always disappointing for a whole years production to have got this far and then to be lost. Losses up to the third month of pregnancy tend to go undetected, being seen as repeat breeders or barren cows. After this it is more likely there will be evidence of abortion with a foetus being found. It is a fact that 1-2% of cattle will abort and so it is not to be unexpected and so long as it is within that margin, can be accepted. If numbers exceed this or a cluster of abortions come together it is time to investigate.

Causes of abortion fall into two general categories

1. Non-infectious and
2. Infectious.

You will all no doubt be familiar with the cow that aborts after being run through the crush or handled for some reason – environmental stress of this kind or due to weather/nutritional stress can all

be non-infectious causes. Genetic defects are another and again the cow aborting twins is likely just due to the hormones not managing to maintain the pregnancy. These are the most likely causes of an occasional abortion.

Investigation of infectious causes of abortion is generally disappointing with less than a third of submitted cases getting a diagnosis. The best chance of diagnosis is where the foetus and any cleanings and also blood from the dam are submitted to the lab. It is important to remember that abortions should be reported to your local Animal Health Office for Brucella investigations. Whilst the UK has been clear of this disease for some years now, the BS7 test is an important surveillance tool to make sure we stay that way.

So don't panic with one abortion, it can be expected, but don't delay in getting your vet to send good quality samples to the vet lab if your getting too many.