

Keep check on cows out to grass

VETERINARY ADVICE

Claire Allen, BVM&S MRCVS, of Alnorthumbria Veterinary Group, explains what to check for in cattle out to grass

THROUGHOUT the summer, it is easy to put cattle out to grass and forget about them, but it is vitally important to keep checking them.

How often should I check the cattle?

Stock should be checked at least once a day, and preferably twice daily. It is easy for cattle to get sick or injured out at grass and it is much easier to sort any problems when they are fresh, rather than waiting until animals are too sick to treat, or even dead.

What sorts of problems might be missed if cattle are not checked?

Problems such as downer cows, injuries, lame cows, mastitis, bloat, scouring calves and abortions or calving difficulties could all be missed.

Most of these are problems which can be managed or treated, if picked up early by daily checking. Some of these problems could also lead to death, or cattle can just be found dead.

What are causes of

downer cows?

Some of the causes of downer cows at grass include low magnesium levels, which cause grass staggers and is an emergency, low calcium, which causes milk fever, often combined with low magnesium, toxic mastitis and bulling injuries.

What types of injuries can occur?

As mentioned above, bulling injuries, both to cows and bulls are common. Bulls can strain ligaments and muscles, often noticed by seeing them lying away from the cows or walking about lame.

If a bull damages its legs it will no longer serve cows, therefore affecting the calving pattern.

It is important to notice these problems as soon as possible by daily monitoring of cattle, so there is as little

disruption as possible to the bulling period and subsequent calving.

Injuries to cows owing to bulling range from a fractured pelvis or dislocated hip through to nerve damage.

Wounds can also occur to any cattle at grass, particularly to the limbs. These are important to pick up on daily checks and address quickly because they can rapidly turn from a small fresh wound to a large infected and maggot filled disaster.

What things could cause sudden death in cattle?

Any cattle that are found dead, by law, must be checked for Anthrax by a vet. Anthrax is a bacteria in the soil which can survive up to 40 years and produces spores that cause rapid death.



SUMMER CARE: check cattle at grass at least once a day

Other causes of sudden death in cattle include low magnesium, clostridial diseases such as black leg, free gas bloat from rich pasture, pasteurilla pneumonia and, much less commonly, lightning strike or electric

shocks.

Would you check the cattle now?

Hopefully, this has provided an incentive to keep a close eye on stock while they are out at grass.

Bear in mind also that

many problems that can be picked up by regular observation will have effects further down the line if not addressed at the time they started, so checking the cattle at grass throughout the summer is essential.

Benefits of cleaning teats at turn-out

by Brian Pocknee

Senior dairy husbandry consultant, The Dairy Group

MANY farmers believe the need for a thorough pre-milking routine ends when the cows are turned out to graze.

The carefully choreographed pre-milking routine when housed is often replaced with a cursory wipe with a paper towel – or nothing at all.

Generally, when cows are grazing the bacterial challenge to the teats is reduced, although wet grazing conditions will confound this.

Removing teat preparation in the summer ignores other substantial benefits that can be achieved.

Early detection of abnormal milk allows it to be excluded from the bulk tank, reducing bacterial counts and the somatic cell count (SCC).

It allows early intervention and treatment which should reduce the recurrence rate and new infections.

Manipulation of cows' teats during pre-milking teat preparation results in milk let-down. A recent review concluded that:

- Less than ten seconds of teat cleaning is not adequate stimulus for consistent let-down response;

- A teat-cleaning procedure that results in a quality stimulus of ten to 20 seconds is adequate to sanitise teats and achieve consistent milk

letdown in most cows;

- The optimum time to apply teatcups is 60-90 seconds after the cow's teats and udder are first touched by the milker (prep lag-time);

- A prep-lag time of 60 seconds reduced average milking time per cow by 40 seconds and increased mean milk yield by 0.32kg per milking.

The perception might be that milking can be speeded up by omitting pre-milking teat preparation during summer, but the opportunity to detect abnormal milk is lost and adverse effects on both the milking speed of cows and the amount of milk they produce could result.

Contact Brian Pocknee on 01969-666136 or 07831-851440.

alnorthumbria
veterinary group

Wagonway Road, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 1QQ
T: 01665 510999
www.alnorthumbriavets.co.uk

T: 01228 710 208
www.paragonvet.com

T: 01539 725492
www.westmorland-vets.co.uk

T: 01765 602396
www.bishopscotesvets.co.uk

T: 01697 2318
www.caponvetservices.co.uk

T: 01904 486712
www.minstervets.co.uk

T: 01434 609996
www.vets1.co.uk

Castles Veterinary Services
T: 01835 695945
www.castlevets.net

T: 01756 700940
www.kingswayvets.co.uk

T: 01900 826666
www.milcroftvets.co.uk

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