

Wet year leads to rise in incidence of liver fluke

BY now most fattening cattle will be housed for the winter. The high price of store cattle and bought-in feed, coupled with the questionable quality of much of the forage made last summer means that health planning and disease prevention are especially important this year.

Are there any diseases that may be a particular problem this winter?

The wet spring and summer means there is a likelihood of an increase in the incidence of liver fluke. Areas traditionally thought to be fluke-free are now seeing the emergence of this disease.

The weather also means that there will be increased levels of mycotoxins in feed and straw for bedding will not be of top quality, contributing to an increase in lameness and respiratory disease.

NORTHERN FARMER VET

Roger Schofield, of the Minster Veterinary Practice, York, looks at the health of store cattle

How can liver fluke be treated?

Cattle are infected with fluke at grazing, but clinical signs associated with the disease are not normally seen until the autumn and winter.

A wide range of treatments (flukicides) are available including drenches, injectables and pour-ons.

Many of these are combination products that include drugs such as ivermectins that are active against gut worms (including inhibited stages) and ectoparasites such as lice and mange, as well as any drug used to control fluke.

Is the timing of any fluke treatment important?

Yes, it is important to remember that not all flukicides are active against all stages of the fluke life-cycle.

Many products have limited activity against immature stages and only kill adult fluke, hence the need to delay treatment for six to seven weeks post-housing with some products (this allows the immature fluke to develop into adults)

What are the advantages of a combination product?

A combined flukicide and wormer (particularly an ivermectin) allows for the control of a wide range of internal and external parasites in a single treatment, cattle only have to be handled

once. It is important, however, that all the animals in a single shed are treated at the same time.

Treating stock at different times means that external parasites such as lice can re-infect 'clean' animals.

What other diseases are important?

Respiratory infections and pneumonia are the main diseases associated with housed fattening cattle. A key component in controlling these infections relies on the use of vaccines.

A plethora of different vaccines are available; many strong stores might only require the use of a single dose of an IBR vaccine.

Vaccine strategies will vary from farm to farm, depending on factors such as if stock are bought in, their age, and the history of any previous diagnoses made on a particular farm.

Any vaccine protocol will depend on the above factors

and discussions between a farmer and his vet.

What about BVD (Bovine Viral Diarrhoea)?

It would be wrong to assume that BVD is simply a problem associated with breeding cattle. So called PIs (cattle persistently infected with BVD virus) often appear as 'poor doers' that require repeated injections of relatively expensive antibiotics.

In the meantime, the BVD virus they excrete suppresses the immune system of in-contact cattle, increasing the incidence of diseases such as pneumonia.

Increasingly, farmers are screening store cattle for BVD on entry to any farm for the presence of PIs. This relies on taking a punch of skin from the ear (while at the same time inserting a management tag). The cost of this is about £6 per animal.



'SCREENING USEFUL': Roger Schofield, of Minster Veterinary Practice

Screening out the PIs reduces antibiotic usage and the use of vaccine in stores that will never survive, as well as the overall incidence of disease in any particular group of cattle.

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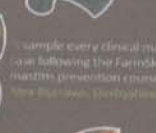
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