Clare Vets Newsletter
May 2010

LEPTOSPIROSIS

Leptospirosis is an infectious bacterial disease and cattle can harbour chronic infections in the urogenital tract. The infection is responsible for abortions, the birth of live, dying or dead calves and returns to service and infertility. Spring and early summer are the periods of increased risk, especially in wet weather. An additional, major problem can also be the use of a chronically infected sweeper bull which can rapidly spread the infection through a herd.

Human Risks
The disease also poses a serious health risk to farmers, especially those who are exposed to urine splashing in the milking parlour. It causes flu-like symptoms, with chronic headaches and, in some cases, can be life threatening.

Control & Vaccination
Basic vaccination protocol is two shots of vaccine four weeks apart from five months of age onwards with annual boosters required thereafter, preferably in Springtime. It is important to remember that vaccination does not cure older cows of the infection and, until these animals leave the herd, they can still infect a new batch of unvaccinated heifers – do not relax a vaccination programme. Vaccination is very cheap when compared to foetal losses and infertility.

Summary
Leptospirosis is still a major cause of foetal loss and infertility in cattle in Northern Ireland but it can be controlled easily through vaccination of cattle before Spring turn out.

IMPROVING COW FERTILITY AT GRASS

OESTRUS DETECTION

Cows are now enjoying spring grass with more settled weather conditions.

OBSERVE cows three times a day to improve heat detection.

Use **detection aids** like **Oestrus alert stickers** or **tail paint** to improve submission rates.

NATURAL SERVICE THE WEAK LINK???

Check natural service bulls are fit for service before use. Pare feet well in advance to improve locomotion capabilities. Feed bulls well to make sure they are in good condition and make sure they have been treated for internal and external parasites.

In dairy herds don't rely too heavily on natural service bulls at grass. **Back up bulls at all times with AI**

If several cows are in heat at once bulls will favour one or two cows and may not serve the others.

If a bull is not working effectively it can be a fertility disaster.

BULL FERTILITY TESTING

If you have any doubts about a bull's fertility it would be a good idea to have a physical exam and semen test carried out.

Contact the practice for more details

HYPOMAGNESAEMIA
STAGGERS PREVENTION

Cows and ewes need a daily amount of magnesium in order to function effectively, this mineral cannot be stored in the body.

Spring grass is generally low in magnesium and gut throughput is quicker on spring grass which leads to an increased incidence of **magnesium deficiency** which can cause **sudden deaths** in sheep and cattle at this time of year.

High potash levels can also have an effect by decreasing plant absorption of magnesium and lowering magnesium levels in spring grass.

Methods of Prevention

Suckler cows and sheep

Give access to high magnesium licks or blocks or best of all feed a small quantity of high magnesium concentrate.

Insert magnesium boluses or add extra magnesium to the water supply.

Dairy cows

Feed concentrate with higher level of magnesium

Add magnesium to the water supply or top dress fresh grass with calcined magnesite.

Buffer feeding with silage around milking will help prevent disease.

For all types of stock apply only straight Nitrogen fertilizer especially in the spring.

BUFFER FEEDING DAIRY COWS

It is essential to 'buffer feed' dairy cows at grass. Grazing alone does not support high yielding dairy cows and failure to buffer feed can lead to:

- Acidosis
- Displaced stomachs
- Weight loss
- Poor fertility

Cows should ideally be fed this extra feed 2 hours before afternoon milking. This has been shown to be much more effective than feeding at milking time.

BLACKLEG & BLACK DISEASE

Our Practice area has experienced a big problem with the above diseases in recent years.

Young stock should be vaccinated **now** before turnout to prevent disease.

BLACKLEG is a soil borne organism which is picked up from the ground and gets into the bloodstream from the gut. It then gets into muscle tissue and multiplies when the muscle is damaged. The bacteria releases a toxin which causes muscle damage and sudden death.

Usually **sudden death** is the first symptom which is observed.

BLACK DISEASE is also picked up from the soil but affects the liver instead of muscle.

You can visit our website on

www.clarevetgroup.co.uk