

March 2018 Newsletter



The 'Beast from the East' has now thankfully passed. Conditions were a bit tricky for a day or two but we managed to get to everyone with a bit of help! Thank you to those of you that cleared lanes and roads etc. Hopefully normal service has now resumed.

Following our Dairy Youngstock meeting at the end of last year we are now looking to harness some of that enthusiasm and help you improve what is happening on your farm. We have a survey to help assess your current position which we can conduct on farm at no cost to you. Those of you that attended the meeting should be contacted shortly but if anyone else is keen to take part then please call the office.

Calf diarrhoea or scours are one of the biggest challenges facing all calf-rearers; we continue to see numerous cases. Our biggest priority when approaching these cases is hydration. Scouring calves become dehydrated very quickly; if they become severely dehydrated this lowers the amount of oxygenated blood circulating the body, which can have very severe effects.

There are a number of infectious diseases that can cause diarrhoea in young calves including: E.coli, Rotavirus, Coronavirus, Cryptosporidia or Salmonella. These diseases will target different parts of the gut causing diarrhoea by either causing increased gut motility i.e. food passes through the gut too quickly to be properly absorbed, reduced absorption i.e. the gut is damaged and cannot absorb the nutrients fully and/or hypersecretion i.e. extra fluid gets secreted into the gut due to gut disease.

Nutritional scours can occur if milk is fed incorrectly i.e. too hot or cold, at an incorrect concentration or if overfeeding occurs. In nutritional scours, the calf will normally remain bright and alert and may only become mildly dehydrated. The feeding regime should be reviewed in cases of nutritional scours to identify the cause of the problem.

Treatment is aimed at maintaining hydration; this is of paramount importance in cases of scour. If scouring calves are able to stand and suck, it is appropriate to offer extra fluids via rehydration fluids by mouth. If the calf is down, weak or unable to suck then fluids will need to be given in the vein by a vet. If rehydration fluids are given by mouth, continuing milk feeding is strongly advised to provide the gut with energy to repair itself. Small milk feeds and rehydration fluid feeds should be alternated throughout the day.

If an infectious cause of scour is suspected then it is important to ascertain the cause of the scour. Dung samples from a few scouring calves should be submitted for testing.

In severe cases of scours, early veterinary treatment is life-saving. If you are struggling with scours or keen to prevent it then there are many options available to help reduce the incidence and severity; the key element of prevention is to ensure adequate, good quality colostrum is fed early. Ideally 10% body weight in the first 6 hours.