

Newsletter February 2018



We have been banging the drum about transition periods for some time now and this message has largely been taken on board with good success, but we do still see a number of individual cows that do not transition well, be that cows that have twins or milk fever and/or ketosis. Can we do anything about these individuals, and how do we know how we are performing? There are several indicators that can be useful to assess your transition performance. The incidence of fresh cow diseases such as Ketosis, LDA's, Milk Fever, White's, Metritis will tell us an awful lot; a crude measure is the number of cows getting culled in the first 100 days of lactation (presumed forced culls). We can help you analyse and assess this performance through your milk recording records. The main focus of the transition period for Dairy cows is the period 3 weeks pre-calving running up to peak lactation. It is important that the early dry period and the post calving period is not ignored however. A suitable transition requires plenty of feed space with a clean water supply, and a diet supplying a moderate energy density of around 10 MJ ME/kg DM. The ration should be formulated to aid the prevention of milk fever by avoiding high potassium feeds and supplementing with anionic salts such as magnesium chloride. Even when all this is supplied, we still see odd cows that struggle with ketosis etc. post-calving. It can be hard to identify the cows that are likely to fail their transition but there are certain indicators. Thin cows or over-fat cows are high risk, as are cows that have had an extended lactation and cows that are showing any signs of disease such as lameness. Cows carrying twins are very high risk. These cows need to be managed closely to ensure adequate dry matter intakes and it may be worth considering a product called Kexxtone. This is administered as a bolus 3wks pre-calving to high risk cows and has been shown in extensive trials to help prevent the incidence of ketosis and associated diseases by 78%. Please talk to us about your cow transition if you feel you are struggling.

With lambing underway the next issue for sheep farmers will be coccidiosis. This is caused by a single-celled parasite called Eimeria and is most often seen in young lambs aged between four and eight weeks of age. Severely affected lambs have profuse diarrhoea, with blood and/or mucus and marked weight loss. Many in the group will show evidence of faecal staining and dirty tails. Lambs can be affected both indoors and outdoors; especially with the current inclement weather. Pasture can quickly become contaminated, so it is advisable to avoid mixed ages of lambs on the same pasture. Immunity is quick to develop in lambs with a low-level exposure especially when in good health (having received plenty of good quality colostrum when born.) The oral treatments (Vecoxan and Baycox) that are available are effective as a treatment but do not provide residual protection. Once lambs have scoured their gut could be badly inflamed and struggle to completely heal. An alternative strategy is to add Deccox to creep feed over the risk periods which can allow immunity to develop. Again, please speak to if you are concerned about your lambs, as it is important we reach a diagnosis and differentiate from other causes of scour.

Finally, many thanks for all your kind wishes regarding my ankle, I hope to be back to full fitness soon!