

TERN VETS LTD

“Supporting British Farming”



AUGUST 2014

Summer Mastitis

British summer weather can be unpredictable at best but summer mastitis certainly isn't. It is a disease that changes very little over the years, affecting the same farms year after year and often just certain fields within those holdings.

Very few mastitis affected quarters will recover, so any treatment is purely salvage and the main goal should be to avoid the disease in the first place, or at least minimise its incidence.

The basics are simple - it occurs in the summer, it is spread by flies and it affects dry cows, heifers or young calves. It is an acute disease of the non-lactating mammary gland and is caused by the bacterium *Trueperella pyogenes*. Other organisms can increase its severity and allow infection to establish more readily.



MAIN SIGNS

farmers should look out for:

- An animal standing apart from the others, often lame, dull, not eating and with a high temperature
- Teats become swollen and there are often large numbers of flies feeding around them.



- Dis-ease progresses until the whole udder is swollen, hard and producing foul-smelling, thick yellow secretions, often tinged with blood. Left untreated, abortion or death can follow.
- Outside the fly season and in milking cows, less typical cases will also occur. It is possible to find heifers calving in with blind quarters having suffered no obvious disease. Efforts to open the teat canal will prove useless and it is highly likely that many of these cases will be due to summer mastitis.

TREATMENT

Very few affected quarters will recover and treatment is aimed at saving the animal and recovering as much as possible. That means saving the animal's life, saving the pregnancy, producing a viable calf or at least a cow that can milk to some extent on the remaining quarters. Treatment includes antibiotics to combat the bacterial infection and anti-inflammatories to counter the swelling, pain and reduce the temperature. Getting the antibiotics to where they are needed is a challenge, as large amounts of pus and dead tissue are present, hence the importance of anti-inflammatory drugs.

Trueperella is sensitive to penicillin, but in some ways this is academic, as the antibiotic struggles to penetrate the damaged udder. Cases are best approached as if treating an abscess. It's essential that as much material as possible is removed by frequent stripping, but while the organism is common in the environment, stripping can be a source of further infection.. Strippings should therefore be discarded safely and not onto the ground.

Occasionally the whole udder can slough off like in a case of gangrenous mastitis.

Sometimes it is necessary to split the teat lengthways to allow better drainage or remove the teat completely.



PREVENTION

The keys to prevention are antibiotic cover for dry cows, fly control, prevention of teat lesions, teat sealants and removal of susceptible animals from susceptible fields.

ANTIBIOTIC COVER

- Intramammary dry cow antibiotics significantly help to reduce disease
- Dry cow antibiotics may not be active for sufficient time and repeat infusion may be needed after 3-4 weeks in high incidence herds.
- Repeating dry cow treatments must be done in consultation with your vet to make sure the correct drug is chosen to avoid long milk withdrawals and performed with strict hygiene.
- In high incidence herds consideration can be given to antibiotic tubing heifers - seek veterinary advice before performing this (and get a hard hat!).

FLY CONTROL

The sheep head fly, *Hydrotea irritans* also carries the bacteria causing summer mastitis, but it is probably only a secondary factor after something else has started the outbreak eg an animal with an infected teat sore. This fly's eggs over-winter in sandy soils and emerge in June or July. There is only one generation of adult flies active in July, August and September. High winds and heavy rains inhibit fly activity.

Controlling flies on cattle is best done using pour-ons or impregnated fly tags. Unfortunately these give little protection to the udder area and it worth giving half a dose of liquid product spread with a gloved hand over the whole udder surface.

TEAT SKIN LESIONS

- It is important to check teats regularly
- Good teat condition will reduce or eliminate the infection as usually the infection starts as a sore at the end of the teat which harbours the bacteria
- Ensure any affected animals are treated and preferably kept away from the rest of the herd
- Additional fly protection can also be given to these animals

TEAT SEALANTS

- Stockholm tar used to be popular, but it's messy to apply and needs repeating regularly
- Taping teats is laborious and difficult to do properly
- The new silicone internal teat sealants have revolutionised this form of management as they are easy to apply and last for the whole dry period.

SUMMARY

- Identify and isolate cases early
- Watch out for teat lesions
- Control flies on cattle (especially around teats)
- Avoid areas with large fly populations (sandy soils, tree cover and water)

A FEW FOND FAREWELLS!

Most of you will have heard now that Mike will be retiring from veterinary practice on 31st December 2014. Mike has spent the past 25 years at Tern Vets and will be sorely missed by the practice team and farmers alike. We wish him and Janet all the very best for their forthcoming retirement together!



We're also sorry to see Gemma from reception move on to pastures new - she's been a great part of our practice team and kept us organised and on-time since she started with us in 2008!



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