

Get on top of parasites at housing

Housing offers a great opportunity to sort out parasite problems in dairy animals. Sara Gregson reports.

Controlling worms in cattle is necessary and essential for animal health and productivity. Housing is a good time to think about a worming programme as cattle can be treated and be cleared of infection before turnout next spring.

Gut worms

There is a real risk of Type II Ostertagiosis in youngstock this winter, following the summer drought and subsequent wet conditions across many parts of the country.

This disease is caused by larvae that are eaten as the days become shorter and temperatures fall. These larvae do not immediately develop into adult worms in the animal's stomach, as they would earlier in the season.

Development stops in the stomach wall and the worms 'hibernate'



There is a high risk of Type II Ostertagiosis in calves this winter.

for a few months until late winter, when they resume development, after an, as yet, unknown trigger. The simultaneous emergence of a high number of stomach wall stage

worms can cause acute disease, particularly in calves after their first grazing season. It can be fatal.

The best way to avoid this is to treat youngstock at housing with a Group 3-macrocyclic lactone (ML) product to kill off the inhibited Ostertagia worms. This has the added benefit that the calves will not immediately contaminate pastures with worm eggs when they go out next spring.

Adult cows should not require treatment for these gut worms at housing, but they may benefit if they are in poor condition. Consider using diagnostic aids such as blood tests to check if treatment is needed. Farmers should talk to their vet or SQP about testing.

There is no natural cattle immunity to liver fluke and all ages of stock can be at risk.

There are several ways to as-

sess the level of risk to the herd. Is there a history of infection on the farm? Have animals been grazing muddy areas where intermediate host mud snails live? What do liver fluke forecasts like those from the National Animal Disease Information Service (NADIS) predict?

Fluke forecast

The provisional NADIS fluke forecast for 2018 is based on rainfall and temperature for the months of August to October 2017 and May to June 2018, and predicts moderate risk in the north and west of Scotland, and low risk in all other regions. A more comprehensive fluke forecast will be provided later in the year.

Information from the abattoir on finished or cull cattle may tell farmers about the presence of fluke

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damage found in the animals' livers. Faecal egg counts can be done to detect fluke eggs in the dung, although this test has relatively low sensitivity.

Antibody detection tests can be carried out on bulk milk or blood samples to see if a herd has been exposed to liver fluke over the past few months.

If liver fluke is known to be present, administering an effective flukicide is essential. Liver fluke treatments target different ages of the parasite so it is important to check the datasheet details of products being used, for example, oral triclabendazole will treat all stages of fluke from two weeks onwards and pour-ons using the same active ingredient from six weeks onwards, while oxyclozanide will only kill adults.

It is also important to check the milk withdrawal dates as these also differ greatly between products. Many are not permitted for use in

cows producing milk for human consumption.

Ecto-parasites

Parasitic lice inhabit the hair, the surface and outer layers of the skin. Both lice and mites are permanent residents on cattle, having populations that increase over winter when the animal's coat is at its thickest.

Lice can cause an inflammatory response resulting in intense itchiness, which can lead to skin damage. Heavy burdens affect productivity.

Treatment at housing will generally give adequate control of cattle lice. There is a range of pour-on or spot-on synthetic pyrethroids, with pour-on and injectable Group 3-MLs also commonly used.

Treatment of all stock on farm and subsequent initial quarantine and treatment of all newly introduced animals will allow a good

degree of louse control to be maintained. Infestation by mites (acarasis) can result in severe dermatitis, known as mange. Cattle mites feed on lymph, blood and sebaceous secretions, which they scavenge from the skin surface. All life cycle stages are found simultaneously on the host.

Chorioptic mange occurs most

often in housed animals and is most commonly seen on the feet, legs and base of the tail and udder. Only a relatively small number of products are authorised for use against mange. Ask the advice of a vet or SQP about which ones to use. The treatment of all animals in a herd is essential to eradicate this parasite.

Getting good advice and preventing resistance

Parasite control can sometimes be confusing and dairy farmers should talk to their vets about the risks and appropriate treatments for their stock. No one solution fits all farms. Control of parasites should be included in the Herd Health Plan, with a strategy for making product choices that will not encourage future resistance.

Other sources of information include farm animal-SQPs which have recently undergone additional compulsory training on worming, the BRP Cattle and Sheep Parasite Control Guide, which lists all the possible treatments and the Control of Worms Sustainably (COWS) group website.

Prevent wormer resistance

Control Of Worms Sustainably (COWS) is a voluntary initiative aiming to provide the best available, evidence-based information to the beef and dairy cattle industries in relation to the sustainable control of both internal and external parasites. It is hoped that by taking action now, cattle producers will not have to confront the difficulties of increasing resistance to products being faced by the sheep sector.

Find out more at the new COWS website www.cattleparasites.org.uk or follow on twitter @COWSWorms.

Case study: Oliver Munday, High House Farm, Kings Lynn, Norfolk

Oliver Munday is a share farmer running a 163ha (400 acre) dairy unit near Kings Lynn in Norfolk with Richard Thompson, who also farms 1,020ha (2,500 acres) of arable and vegetable land 20 miles away at Holbeach.

The two businesses run separately but there are animal health benefits of having two closely aligned farms.

All calves from the 350-cow autumn block calving cross-bred herd travel to Holbeach at



Oliver Munday with his dairy herd.

two to three weeks of age, spending their first year grazing one-year grass leys which rotate with vegetable crops. There is also mixed grazing with sheep. The aim is to create clean grazing which allows growth rates of more than 1.0kg/day.

At one year old, the heifers return to the Kings Lynn farm and graze on permanent pastures until housing. Faecal egg counts are carried out by the vet and the animals are treated if needed, which is rare. They are vaccinated against lungworm. They face greater gut worm threat in the second year grazing but this helps boost their immunity as they become adults.

"Having the two farms is really useful for worm control," admits Mr. Munday. "We bought-in 25 heifers from Holland earlier this year and they went straight onto a separate block of land at Holbeach for a month in quarantine, before coming here."

Despite being on heavy land, which can be wet, the farm has never had a case of liver fluke. A recent faecal egg count test from the milking herd showed no liver fluke eggs to be present.

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