

March 2008

Perennial Ryegrass Toxicosis (Staggers)

Once again at this time of year we are seeing, or hearing of, quite a few cases of staggers around the district. Perennial ryegrass toxicosis or 'Ryegrass Staggers' is a continuing problem in Southern Australia and seems to be on the increase. As you may be aware the toxicity is a result of a fungus/endophyte, which lives on the ryegrass. The toxin produced acts on the animal's brain and can cause staggering and incoordination, falling over and muscle tremor or shaking. These effects are generally fully reversible. 'Staggers' is not the only effect of the toxin. Decreased milk production of between 10-20%, scouring, weight loss, selective appetite, lameness and heat stress can also occur. It is important to note that the shorter and younger the pasture the higher the concentration of fungal toxins. Prevention is therefore aimed at avoiding the grazing of short perennial ryegrass pastures, especially with young cattle, and this can be achieved by;

- Offering animals pasture with high leaf levels and low amounts of stem and dead material.
- Avoiding the need for animals to graze at the base of pastures.
- Decreasing stocking rates so animals are not forced to eat as low.
- Providing different/mixed pasture species for summer-autumn grazing periods.
- Provide another source of forage eg; hay or silage.

Once staggers is present it is important to manage cases carefully. Cattle should not be put under pressure and any stock movements should be carried out slowly and calmly. Sometimes opening the gate and allowing cattle to drift to the next paddock in their own time works well. Milking cows may need to be dried off to avoid continuing problems in the yard or bail.

The condition will resolve with time and residual effects are rare. Rain and cooler weather usually heralds the end of this problem.

Veterinary Practice Inspections

Over the past three years, all Tasmanian veterinary practices have been inspected to evaluate compliance with State legislation and the Standards of Veterinary Practice as required by the Veterinary Board of Tasmania.

Smithton Veterinary Service was one of the most recently inspected practices and we are pleased to inform our clients that the Board appointed inspector was more than happy with our level of compliance.

He made particular positive comments about the following aspects of our practice and service:

- Clinic layout and presentation;
- Format, content and accessibility of Standard Operating Procedures for vets and office staff covering both companion and farm animals;
- Use of appropriate consent forms for small animal procedures;
- Practice newsletter;
- Involvement in farmer continuing education eg lame cow workshops;
- **Ethical prescribing** of prescription animal drugs based on established and on-going vet-client relationships including examination of animals and submission of laboratory samples as necessary.

Preven

For many years we have been using Preven powder as a preventative for calf scours. Having recently reviewed the information on antibiotic resistance in animals we will be changing our recommendations for use of this product.

The recommended regime is that when and if scours become apparent, in the first instance calves will receive a higher dose rate for a period of 5-7 days only. All calves in the shed (not just the scouring ones) can be treated at this time with the aim of reducing the load of scours bacteria in the shed. In some circumstances we may decide to repeat treat groups of calves with an appropriate interval in between.

Having spoken to some Victorian vets recently it is apparent that we are still very lucky in Tasmania with regards to antibiotic resistance in cattle. Many of the traditional, cheaper antibiotics are still very effective here. The opposite is true in Victoria with widespread resistance to Salmonella in particular. We would like to prolong this advantage for as long as possible.

Once again, this is a timely reminder of the importance of careful prescribing and use of antibiotics by vets and farmers. If you have any questions regarding Preven please feel free to ask. If scours is mild and scour tablets/Bovelyte are effective then continue with these. If scours is more severe or rapidly spreading then the above regime needs to be considered.

Cidirol

Some of you may have heard us mention recently that oestradiol/cidirol has been banned for use in food-producing animals in the EU and some other countries. The latest news is that NZ has now prohibited the importation, manufacture, sale and use of oestradiol.

We have now been notified that the Australian dairy industry (Australian Dairyfarmers Limited) has agreed to introduce a voluntary restriction on the use of oestradiol for lactating dairy cows commencing 1/1/2008. The restriction will still allow oestradiol to be registered and available for use in non-lactating dairy heifers and beef cattle.

The restriction has been introduced for trade purposes in response to the EU regulations. Food safety is **not** an issue. What this means for us and for you is that cidirol will no longer be used as part of our current treatment programs for anoestrus cows and for synchrony of lactating cows. There are alternative drugs available with trials underway in NZ and Australia to evaluate various protocols. We will keep you notified of these new protocols as more information comes to light.

Automate

Farmers are advised, once current stock has run out, that Automate will no longer be available. The active ingredient has been discontinued for veterinary use. We are currently searching for alternatives from our suppliers and will keep you informed.

Circular Head Respiratory Disease Complex

Some cattle in the Circular Head region are currently succumbing to a respiratory condition that can progress to pneumonia. We believe the causes of this condition are multi-factorial, with a variety of environmental and cattle associated factors having an influence.

Cattle have very small lungs relative to their body weight. In addition to this, their lungs are also very reactive. It does not require much in the environment to change to increase a cow's susceptibility to respiratory infection. These environmental risk factors include hot, dry and dusty conditions, and fluctuations between day and night time temperatures. The relative health of the animal in terms of adequate nutrition and other existing infections also has an influence.

All these factors contribute to impairing the defenses of the bovine respiratory system making them susceptible to a variety of infectious agents. These include primary and secondary bugs. The primary bugs include viruses and mycoplasmas, which can cause damage to the lung tissue and predispose to infection by secondary agents. These secondary agents are usually bacteria and more severe complications and illness can result. Allergy/asthma factors can also be involved.

Animals infected with primary bugs are usually mentally alert but have elevated rectal temperatures, increased respiratory rate and lung sounds, a drop in milk production and appetite, and variable amounts of respiratory distress indicated by drooling and coughing. When bacteria become involved the clinical signs progress with animals being more depressed, showing increased difficulty in

breathing, higher rectal temperatures and some of these animals may become toxic and die.

Treatment of pneumonia usually involves the use of broad spectrum antibiotics to prevent or treat secondary bacterial infections plus anti-inflammatories to reduce body temperature and promote a return of appetite and milk production. Occasionally, lung infections are refractory to treatment requiring repeat treatments with either the same or a different antibiotic.

Another respiratory syndrome we see in the Circular Head area is a type of 'fog fever'. Overseas this is caused by a toxin or protein that is present in the pasture at certain times of the year and at different stages of growth. Mortality is very high, however the syndrome we see in CH, whilst appearing similar, has a very low mortality. Clinically animals may show mild respiratory signs to severe respiratory distress with frothy saliva and mouth breathing with a protruding tongue and cattle can die in severe cases. Rectal temperature is often normal and coughing is not a frequent feature. Treatment usually involves removing the cattle from the offending pasture and the use of anti-histamines and anti-inflammatories. Antibiotics may or may not be prescribed.