



MAY 2015 NEWSLETTER

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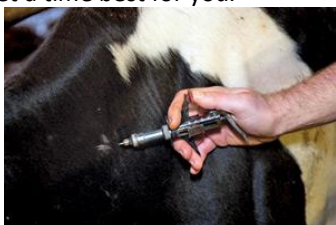
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TB TESTING

You may have noticed on your T.B. notifications that you need to contact XLFarmcare North. Testing is now being co-ordinated under this brand but we are still doing all of your testing. Ignore this and contact us at the office as normal. As you can imagine T.B work is continually getting busier so to prevent having to book your test last minute and end up with an awkward time just before the deadline which does not really suit we ask that when you receive notification can you please contact us as soon as possible to get a time best for you.



Hi All,

With a welcome change in the weather, most of the grazers out and even the very start of this years first cut in, Summer seems fast approaching and Winter long behind... Happy Days!

Things have remained busy in the practice with the lambing season finishing off, pre-breeding examinations on our spring calvers and importantly continued routine consulting and fertility visits despite the tough times, so when things do eventually take a turn for the better we are all hopefully still bang on track.

This month's newsletter is a little longer as I had too much to say (like usual) but I hope you can all take something from it.

Michael



**nantwich
farm vets**

On Farm...

OUT & ABOUT

Well done to the Whittaker and Seaton families on successes at the Western Holstein Club annual show held on April 8th at Southview Equestrian Centre! And a big congratulations to Mark Robinson, Woodhey on Reserve Senior Champion with Woodhey Bolton Jennifer!! Many thanks to the rest of you who helped organise another successful show!

Also I hope all the Western Holstein Club enjoyed the farm walk at Grosvenor Farming Ltd's new dairy unit last Wednesday. I don't think anyone walked away unimpressed by the state of the art facilities and incredible cow comfort they've managed to create.

Western Holstein Club are hosting a stock judging event with kind permission of Will and Louise Glenn at Meadow Farm, the home of their Distinctive Holsteins herd which had an impressive feature in last month's Holstein Journal. It's a 7pm meet on Wednesday 3rd June.

Shropshire Holstein Club stock judging is being held at Andrew and Jane Whittaker's Ivy House Farm on 27th May at 7.30pm. Many of you will be familiar with the Knowlesmere herd name from the dairy show circuit and again it will be a brilliant opportunity to see some great cows.




They are sure to be a great night's craic with hog roast and plenty to drink at both!

MASTITIS:- Still the most costly disease faced by the dairy industry and although we have come a long way there is still lots to be saved by making some simple changes.

Recently we have been looking in-depth on a number of our dairies at their milking process in order to reduce mastitis and maximise parlour efficiency. Learning from years of experience in this area from experts in the States, we are ultimately trying to maximise the amount of milk obtained per stall in a period of time no matter what size the parlour:- More efficient for the farmer, and if standards are kept high, much better for the cow.

Milking should always be a pleasant experience for every cow but we effectively want to get her in, out and back to the feed fence or lying down as quickly as possible so she can carry on doing what she does best,- making more milk.

As far as the cow is concerned each milking could be divided up into three times. Time spent:

-  in the collecting yard pre milking,
-  in the parlour,
-  after exiting the parlour before she can return to bed.

It used to be common practice to keep cows standing in the collecting yard after milking in order to allow time for teat ends to close in an attempt to prevent environmental mastitis. Current thought is this may be doing more harm than good. The more time spent on her feet in a busy collecting yard the increased chances of lameness and stress, added to reduced lying times and intakes. We now advise to let them back into the shed but to make sure fresh food is available so the cows with healthy feet choose to stand and eat. The ones that desperately need a rest after a standing in the parlour have more to worry about than a slight increased risk of mastitis, and the reduced standing time will do them more good.

Time spent in the collecting yard pre- milking is completely dependent on group size relative to parlour speed and is harder to manage. Bringing them out in smaller groups is one option but also getting cows through the parlour as quickly as possible may be the best way to decrease this time.

As already mentioned milking must be as stress-free as possible so that a cow comes in and milks out as quickly as possible. Milk flow from a cow's udder is bi- phasic (occurs in two parts). The first milk is the little amount that is already in her teat cistern but the majority is held in the udder glands. A hormone Oxytocin is released by the cow in order for her to 'let her milk down' from the second chamber. Adrenaline – a hormone released during stress, has the complete opposing effect and prevents milk let down. You are all familiar with the stressed heifer at the back, or the one who has had painful teats that now won't let her milk down. It's therefore crucial to prevent any stress on entering the parlour or during teat preparation if we want her to milk out efficiently. Be quiet & consistent.

Cow flow is important. Cows should want to run into the parlour because milking should be a pleasant experience- relief from that tension in her udder. Those that do it best very rarely have to leave the pit pushing cows in and never raise their voice, both of which are stressful and teach the cows to hate the parlour.

Adequate teat preparation is vital in maximising this oxytocin release, allowing a cow to milk out quicker. We now advise a MINIMUM of 10 seconds contact time whether you use a wipe or brush then a minimum of 90 seconds between finishing prep and unit attachment. Prepping one cow then attaching a unit then moving on to the next is highly inefficient. It will cause teat end damage due to painful vacuum on teats when there is no milk flow. This prolonged preparation might make it feel like you are going slower but I guarantee the 'unit on time' will eventually be much less: cows will enjoy milking more and effectively train themselves to milk out faster and faster. – No more waiting on units to come off.

Another interesting factor determining 'unit on time' which we have altered on a number of farms lately is the milk flow rates at which ACR's kick in. There are two schools of thought here – either low, but with a lower vacuum (increases unit on time), or high, leaving milk on, but with a high vacuum (faster milk letdown and shorter unit-on-time). In the EU these have traditionally been set at a very low level as we historically assumed we must suck out all the milk in the udder maximising total yield and preventing mastitis. We now know this is untrue and can actually have serious detrimental effects. When units remain attached when flow rate is too low this can cause severe damage to teat ends, increasing mastitis. And again, milking becomes painful and cows are uncomfortable, guaranteeing the cow becomes a slow milker. Your optimum flow rates will depend on your parlour and regime but... (*continued overleaf*)

(from previous page)... it has a huge effect on milking times. We have had one new client make a serious investment in order to increase the milk flow at which the ACRs remove the clusters: in a 350 cow herd they have ultimately taken nearly an hour off each milking! What could you do with two more hours in the day? SCC's have dropped below 150'000 for the first time ever, and cows are giving **more** milk as a result of less time spent away from feed. To top it off, lameness, which was a major problem, is down hugely, with cows now being treated to having an hour's lie-in every day! There are a lot of new developments in milking strategies, and we encourage you to speak to any of us if you think there might be ways you could improve how your parlour works both for you and your cows.

On a slight side note, many of you have been discussing with us about on-farm mastitis culturing. The aim is to diagnose the need for treatment before antibiotics are used, and not treat those cows which had either got rid of their infection before showing signs, or have a high chance of self-cure. After a few months, the first farms on this program have commented that 'it's working unbelievably well'. With much fewer drugs being used and less milk down the drain, and a better understanding of their cows. It is only appropriate for certain farms, but if you are keen to find out more get in contact with Stuart.



BVD UPDATE

Between 11th December 2014 and 30th March 2015 we ran a BVD scheme with reduced cost testing to all our clients. 33 farms in total completed BVD testing; this included 30 dairy farms, 2 heifer rearing units and 1 beef farm. 23 out of these 33 farms were already vaccinating against BVD. 11 farmers contacted us to say that testing would not be required as they were using both BVD vaccine in the herd and Tag and Test on all new born calves.

The full BVD Package included: 2 bulk milk BVD PCR tests 3 months apart and 10 youngstock antibody tests (taken from heifers 6-12 months old prior to vaccination). On the 30 farms which have had bulk milk BVD PCR results, 6 came back positive. To date we have received 270 youngstock antibody results back from 27 different farms. 14 out of 27 farms had at least one positive result suggesting that these animals had come into contact with active BVD infection circulating on the farm. 9 out of these 14 farms with positive results were already vaccinating for BVD demonstrating that vaccination alone is not enough to eradicate the disease.

We recommend that any client that has had positive results on either the bulk milk BVD PCR or youngstock antibody tests begins to vaccinate for BVD (if they are not already doing so) and begins to use BVD eartags in all new born calves.

Tesco clients will shortly receive a letter about a new BVD screening offer. The Tesco Sustainable Dairy Group have been working with NML and Boehringer Ingelheim to provide a similar package of BVD screening tests, again at a reduced cost. You can opt to delay this testing if you have already completed the Nantwich Farm Vets BVD scheme, or use it as a continuation.

Laura

#DC305

As a practice we have been using the herd management software DairyComp 305 extensively for over three years, and understand how to use this system at a very advanced level. Stuart worked very hard to get this software into our practice as he felt it's simply the best dairy data analysis tool in the world. Some of our clients have already installed it on farm and those of you who receive our monthly CowWatch reports will be a little familiar with it's formatting, maybe without realising it. The detail of information we can extract about your herds is unbelievable, and we have already used it to make some serious management decisions on farms calculating the likely herd and cost benefits of the change. Whether you have it installed on farm or just allow us to access your information together we can look at your fertility and production data in more detail than ever before. I'm afraid that when you need to make an important decision or investigate a problem, off-the-shelf analysis (even from DairyComp 305!) may not be good enough. Software that isn't up to scratch could well be giving you the wrong advice! Because of this we have invested in the programme further. This will allow all of us to easily create accurate reports and feedback for you. All we require is your permission to access your on-farm DairyComp 305 or milk recording data. For further information just speak to any of the Vets.



FOCUS ON FERTILITY

Most of you are on regular routine fertility visits. Along with giving your cows the best chance of surviving for another year, it's a great opportunity to have a relaxed discussion about other aspects of the farm at the same time.

The financial benefits of getting cows in calf as soon as possible after calving has been widely proven and it's no surprise those of you with regular routines are more likely to see the benefits of lower average days in milk with more cows at the peak of lactation, resulting in higher average yields (and more heifers each year!).

One of the major struggles as cows become more productive is detecting heats. Today's high-producing cow shows physical signs more subtly, and for a much shorter time. How are you going to catch her when she sneaks on in the middle of the night? The cow has changed, but the fertility management of many herds in the UK has remained the same! No one tool works 100%, so we need the whole toolbox. For the last few years we have been using more synchronisation than ever before, and Stuart has done some serious economic modelling to investigate whether or not different herd protocols pay for the UK farmer. The research behind synchronisation protocols is extensive, while it also shows we as vets might not be as good at interpreting ovaries and making single cow decisions as we used to think we were! Should we be comparing your herd's performance to 'no intervention' or to 'gold-standard'?

Synchronisation gives us some control over a cow's cycle and effectively time a cow's ovulation so she can be AI'd even if she isn't seen in heat. On farms with great compliance we are achieving results which are simply impossible to achieve with even the best heat detection systems alone, and the financial benefits of increased 21-day pregnancy rates are far out weighing the initial costs. Some people ask is it ethical to jab all these cows? Is it ethical to cull them because we have not done a good enough job of inseminating her at the right time? Putting together a herd protocol is a surprisingly difficult task – it requires real knowledge of how the protocols work together or they may fight against each other, and there's simply no way we can calculate the economics & likely success of our decision while we stand behind the cow (but we **can** at the herd level – design a protocol and stick to it!). All of these protocols are still based around the need for quality heat detection, but if designed incorrectly they may even prevent it! In a correctly-designed herd protocol, synchronisation gives us a lot more opportunity to get semen into those which 'we never see bulling' before she becomes unprofitable and risks a change of career.

Many of you ask how frequently you should do a routine. I really favour weekly routines for a number of reasons: They allow us to PD more cows earlier saving us a great deal of time on those cows which are empty. Compliance seems to be higher as it's easy to fall into a good routine of 'these cows must be due this injection as it's this day of the week' - less gets missed. They allow us to get negative PD's served more quickly than on less frequent routines, as well as re-starting synchs at a more appropriate stage of the oestrus cycle in a lot of cases. Also on farms using heavy synchronisation, we are finding it very beneficial to re-scan cows which are on day 7 of their protocol and decide whether or not to continue with the synch or restart it which can sometimes be required. Trying to spare the nitty gritty detail here, but there is huge potential to make improvements on fertility.

For those of you who block calve, you may or may not be as familiar with fertility examinations and synch protocols. I have been looking lately at the economics of increased veterinary input between calving and breeding for these systems. The financial benefits of serving the maximum number of cows in the first weeks (ideally the first week) of breeding and therefore calving them earlier is huge and a lot more than I first thought. Ensuring cows are clean and cycling ell before breeding commences and targeting those which haven't had an observed heat early is vital to maximising the number of cows breed in the first three weeks. There is a great value to each pregnancy and with TB becoming an even greater problem it is less easy to sell those which are empty or have become pregnant late and fall out of the herd's calving pattern. Despite purposely being a lesser input system there are simple things we can do which should strongly influence the farms profitability for the following year.

Fertility Summary

