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Farm Information Sheet

The Control of Digital Dermatitis

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Digital Dermatitis is a bacterial infection of the skin of the feet of cattle. If this infection affects the coronary band, it will interfere with horn growth.

Once cattle are infected, they become carrier animals i.e. despite the lameness resolving, the cow's skin remains infected.

New calved cows and heifers are the most susceptible animals to lameness caused by this disease. Once a herd is infected, there is no cure. The control of digital dermatitis must be aimed at preventing "flare ups" not just reacting to them.

Holistic Approach

Remember dry skin is resistant to infection so try to keep cow's feet as dry as possible. Concentrate on making cubicles dry and comfortable and ensuring the buildings are well ventilated.

Automatic scrapers have been shown to worsen digital dermatitis as they create a wave of faeces washing over the cows' feet.

Foot bathing must be the major control.

Antibiotics

Antibiotics must only be used as treatment for digital dermatitis.

Individuals – scrub the skin and lesion thoroughly.

Apply oxytetracycline spray.

Alternatively, apply the content of a milking cow mastitis tube and bandage over the lesion.

Herd treatment – not recommended.

No product is licensed for this use.

There is a risk of environmental contamination.

Antibiotics tend to be expensive.



Typical Digital Dermatitis Lesion

Disinfectants

There are many alternatives, which appear as good as each other.

The two commonest solutions are

3-5% Formulin. Suggested regime - treat for 7 days the 7 days rest or treat 3 times each week.

10% Copper Sulphate

Footbath as often as possible so make it easy.

Place the footbath at the exit of the parlour and use one with a comfortable walking surface in its base.

Ensure the feet are clean before footbathing by using a pre-treatment footbath as they enter the parlour or hose the feet off in the parlour.

It is important to footbath dry cows and in calf heifers to reduce the infection load on their feet and reduce the severity of clinical signs at and after calving.