



# Highgate Veterinary Clinic

## Farmers Newsletter - July 2007

### Doctor Grass – Not all it's cracked up to be?

On wet miserable February days, farmers, vets and no doubt cows yearn for turnout day. At that point in the year, Doctor Grass seems to be just what is needed to cure all ills but this year we've continued to have problems.

Stillbirths, held cleansings, displaced abomasums, cysts, poor conception rates and just disappointing production has dogged several herds both dairy and beef.

In two instances blood samples showed low selenium to be a cause of still births and possibly poor pregnancy rates in heifers. A herd identified low blood calcium as a cause of held cleansings and subsequent displaced abomasums. A further two herds on blood sampling have been shown to be energy deficient.

Grazed grass is an unknown quantity, we rarely analyse its contents and it probably would be a bit of a waste of time if we did. On a warm sunny spring day you can expect grass to provide maintenance plus 20 litres but if it rains the next day it will barely supply maintenance! The dry matter of grass drops dramatically on a wet day and in addition, cows would rather cower behind the wall than eat.

So what's the answer? Obviously the selenium situation can be rectified with supplementation, but energy and calcium are trickier.

One client has decided to house his cattle again. This should mean he's got more control over the diet but its not always that simple. Another client who houses all year round has in desperation turned his dry cows out because "Things couldn't get any worse".

Blood sampling is a useful tool to help diagnose a problem but it cannot be relied upon solely. It is essential that the farmer, nutritionist and the vet work as a team to sort these problems out.

It's even better to use blood sampling to monitor the diet so that action can be taken to prevent problems occurring. Edinburgh University offers a service in which at least quarterly metabolic profiles can be performed. Each test can follow a change in diet so the new diet can be tweaked if necessary. Although a cost of £480 per annum for this service appears expensive, when compared to the losses experienced when things go wrong, it's a very small price to pay for peace of mind.

### Rickets in Hogs



Photograph Courtesy Penrith VLA

Penrith VLA centre has reported that in late winter it investigated several cases of deformed legs in hill hogs being wintered on dairy farms. Their conclusion on post mortem was that rickets caused all these cases.

Rickets is caused by a deficiency of vitamin D which is used to absorb calcium from the gut and to build bone in the growing animal. Ruminants get almost all their vitamin D from a chemical reaction in their skin which is triggered by UV light. There is little vitamin D in green fodder and there are reports in the literature of young cereals and ryegrass predisposing animals to rickets.

### Colin's New Van



Colin's new wheels with subtle advertising!

### This Month: July



Fly control in dry cows with Spot on or Butox and use Orbeseal with antibiotic dry cow therapy for extra protection.