



HIGHGATE VETERINARY CLINIC— Farmer Newsletter

May 2009

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Clinic opening times
Monday—Friday
8.30am—7.30pm
Saturday
9.00am—12.30am
Sunday
emergencies only

Don't forget the magnesium...

As spring is upon us and cows are being turned out, it is worth a reminder about hypomagnesaemia (or grass staggers).

It frequently results in dead cows and can therefore incur significant losses. The problem can often be a major problem for beef suckler cows at grass with calves at foot.

Magnesium is an essential mineral for a wide range of processes in the body of all animals. However, the cow does not have any system to regulate levels of magnesium in the blood – and in addition, cows (and sheep) are not very good at absorbing it from the diet. On a good day, 35% of dietary magnesium is absorbed: on a bad day, less than 10% is absorbed.

All of which means that a cow is at constant risk of hypomagnesaemia, especially when she is producing milk which represents a continuous drain of magnesium from the body.

Risk factors

There are a large number of well recognized risk factors which “lock up” the available magnesium in the diet and prevent it being fully absorbed.

High levels of potassium are bad news in particular, so care is required with the use of potash fertilizers and slurry applications on grazing fields. The situation can be compounded if levels of sodium in the pasture are low, as sodium is required to transport magnesium through the gut wall into the body.

Low fibre levels in lush grazing also

speed the passage of food through the gut, limiting the time available to absorb magnesium.

Daily requirements

An average dairy cow needs to absorb 5 grams of magnesium per day to meet her needs. Taking an average absorption of 20%, she will need to take in 30 grams of magnesium each day in the diet. The most common way of achieving this is by including 60 grams (2 oz) of calcined magnesite per cow per day in the diet – either in the parlour cake, or TMR buffer feed.

It is important to remember that this is for the “average” cow with an “average” level of absorption. If conditions are poor, then the cow may only absorb half the required amount of magnesium from the diet – and so more supplementation will be needed.

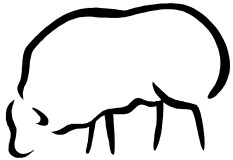
In beef suckler cows, feeding high magnesium cobs during high risk periods is essential.

Magnesium boluses can also work well in beef cows, but free access minerals will not reliably supply enough magnesium to meet daily needs.

Feeding straw or other sources of long fibre can also help slow the passage of food through the gut, helping magnesium absorption.

Blood sampling

If you are not sure if the cows are getting enough magnesium, then blood sampling will tell you before you get dead cows. Call us to make an appointment.



Free Blood Testing

It's not too late to blood sample ewes to confirm toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion as the **free testing by Intervet will run until the end of July.**

Using these results you can vaccinate pre-topping this year.

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New faces

Over the last 12 months we have welcomed new staff to help build our knowledgeable and helpful team. Sadly we have had to say goodbye to much valued staff due to retirement or relocation.

At the end of May **Colin Keron** will retire after many years of service.

He will be replaced by experienced farm locum, **Mike Christian** in the short term before we welcome a new colleague to our veterinary team. We have a short-list of candidates for the vacancy and a decision will be made later this month.

Liz Dodd is also going on maternity leave for six months, beginning in May.

Her work will be covered partly by Sarah Harker increasing her hours, and partly by experienced locum **Marcelle Cassar**.

Blue Tongue vaccination

Up to now, half of our clients have bought about 27,000 doses of Bovilis BTV.

These clients are to be congratulated for their commitment to protecting their stock and helping to suppress the disease nationally. That said, if this is a reflection of the uptake of vaccination in the county, it is not enough.

The aim is that over 80% of stock needs to be protected to prevent blue tongue disease establishing itself in the UK.

This is a preventable disease which can be devastating in affected herds and flocks. We do understand that some farmers are waiting to vaccinate sheep later in the spring to fit in with other management tasks.

We urge those who are not planning to vaccinate to reconsider their position and seek advice from us.

Bull fertility

It is estimated that taking fixed and variable costs and depreciation into account, keeping a bull costs at least £30 per calf produced.

When this is compared with using AI semen, keeping a bull is not the cheap option it seems.

An infertile bull can be a disaster but is easy to spot – no calves! A sub-fertile bull can cause big problems

but in a more subtle way.

Sub-fertile bulls

A sub-fertile bull will get cows in calf but conception rates are low, so calving periods are extended in suckler herds, and sweeper bulls in dairy herds are no better or even worse than AI!

Testing

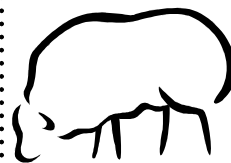
So how do you identify these bulls? Semen

samples give you a good idea of the fertility of bulls. Testing them before they're needed helps avoid disappointing conceptions.

We can easily and safely test a bull for fertility using our electro ejaculator.

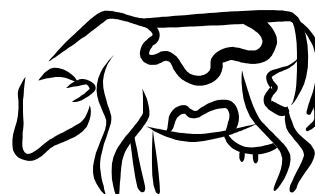
If you want to ensure your calf crop next year, please contact the surgery to make an appointment.

This month:



Look out for scouring lambs and make a diagnosis. Is it coccidiosis or

Nematodirus? Before guessing and wasting money- get it tested!



Ensure you have a worm control plan for your young stock before turnout. There are lots of products out there and you could be spending more money than you need to on anthelmintics.

Look out for scouring calves after turnout. They can suffer from coccidiosis as well.