

June 2011

## Prevention of Milk Fever



Currently 5-10% of cows are affected by clinical milk fever but a realistic target should be less than 3%. Sub-clinical milk fever can affect up to a further 40% of cows. Both types milk fever can lead to many other problems such as slow/difficult calvings, retained cleansings, uterine prolapse, mastitis, displaced abomasums and ketosis!

Milk fever cows are up to eight times more likely to develop mastitis and four times more likely to develop a displaced abomasum in the following lactation..

The key to prevention of milk fever is management of the close up dry cow group. The primary cause of problems is nearly always the forage content of the diet, together with the mineral content of the diet eaten during the last two weeks of pregnancy.

Diets high in Potassium, Calcium and Sodium may predispose cows to milk fever whereas diets high in Chloride and Sulphate may help control the problem.

Grass is a particular problem as it is usually high in Potassium and Calcium.

Maize silage, Wholecrop, Straw and Brewers grains help prevent milk fever due to their lower mineral content.

**If you start to have a large number of milk fever cases then the first step should be to change the forage being fed to the dry cows in the last two weeks of pregnancy.**

Dietary change, by moving cattle to an alternative field, introducing conserved forage to those at grass, using silage from another clamp or increasing the proportion of wholecrop or maize silage in proportion to grass silage can sometimes stop or prevent an epidemic entirely.

**A safer pasture for Milk Fever prevention.**



It is possible to produce a sward which will reduce the of milk fever. Such a pasture can be grazed by dry cows and also used to make big bale silage for close up dry cows in the housed months.

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- Select a small acreage which will not have had manure applied to it.
- Plant a long term ley.
- Avoid all forms of Potassium fertiliser - particularly manure/slurry.
- Grow with no fertiliser other than nitrogen to reduce the soil potassium levels.

## Magnesium

Low magnesium can cause milk fever. Blood sampling a group of cows a few days before calving will confirm whether low magnesium levels are a problem. Providing magnesium chloride in the diet (80g per cow per day) or drinking water can reduce milk fever problems.

## Calcium Drenches- Botonic Calcium and Aggers Pro-Calcium Drench



There are now two products which are excellent in both preventing and treating Milk Fever- Botonic Calcium and Aggers Pro-Calcium Drench.

They are of a similar formulation; both products contain 42g of calcium, compared to the 12g in a bottle of 40% calcium for injection. Botonic Calcium is a syringe delivered by mastic gun whereas the recently released Agger's Pro

Calcium Drench comes as a single cow dose in a purpose designed plastic drenching bottle.

Both contain two types of calcium; Calcium chloride is absorbed very quickly whereas calcium sulphate gives a slower more sustained release of calcium. Another advantage over injectable calcium is that the chloride and sulphate will create an acidifying effect on the blood which helps with the release of calcium from the bones. This is important in reducing subsequent relapses.

**We have taken independent specialist veterinary advice and would now recommend that these calcium drenches be used when you would previously have used subcutaneous calcium.**

Calcium drenches have a greater and longer lasting preventative effect than subcutaneous calcium. They will also avoid unsightly injection abscesses which are commonly produced by injectable calcium.

One Agger's calcium drench or Botonic calcium tube at calving and another 8-12 hours later will prevent the majority of milk fever cases.

**Please note that cows down with clinical milk fever still require intravenous calcium.**