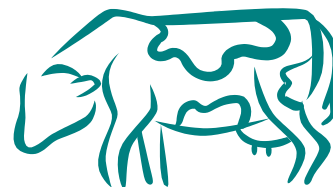


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Newsletter May 2017

Are your tracks up to the job?

Well designed and effective cow tracks are essential to maximise grass utilisation in any grass based dairy system. Whilst dry, clean pasture is ideal - rarely will it withstand persistent daily use, especially in wet conditions. **A good cow track will improve your herd's foot health and udder hygiene as well as extending your grazing season.**



Non-existent or poor tracks can increase the number of diagnosed white line lesions due to uneven ground underfoot and loose stones tracking into the sole. Jostling for position on narrow tracks can increase lameness rates within a herd. Dirty, muddy tracks will encourage the spread of digital dermatitis as well as increasing the prevalence of environmental mastitis.

A good cow track does not need to be expensive - you may even have the materials available on farm. A stone/rubble base built up with a camber will allow for sufficient drainage as well as offering some stability. **The most important part in constructing a cow track is the top layer**, selecting the right material for the job is vital. There are many options available to farmers at various levels of durability (and cost). Materials range from sandstone, chalk or woodchip to more obscure materials such as reclaimed Astroturf. The route your tracks take should also be considered. **Ideally cows should be able to walk the most practical direct route**, thus reducing the distance they have to travel.

For more help on designing a new cow track, or advice on repairing an existing track contact your nearest office and speak to one of the FVSW vets

Be prepared for Grass Stagers



Make sure you always have a bottle or two of magnesium (Magniject) kept in reserve. As the weather warms up, a sudden rapid growth of grass can result in a diet low in magnesium. **Magnesium is not stored in the body so cows must consume at least 8g daily.**

Hypomagnesemia (or staggers) should be dealt with as an emergency, even more so than milk fever, and treatment should be administered as soon as possible. Unlike Calcium, Magnesium **should be administered under the skin and NOT intravenously**. Having Magniject available on farm will allow you to do this whilst waiting for a vet to arrive. To prevent staggers in your herd you may wish to consider supplementing grass with additional feed or licks. Other ways in which magnesium can be supplemented include boluses (Rumbul), water supplementation or pasture dressing.

Coccidiosis & Nematodirus in Lambs

Coccidiosis is caused by the parasite *Eimeria* which lives in the intestine causing profuse diarrhoea which may also contain blood. The disease is associated with poor growth rates and can cause a high mortality rate in some flocks where infection pressure is high.

Risk factors include:

- High stocking densities
- Creep feeding
- Lambs grazing fields previously grazed by older lambs this year
- Mixed age groups
- Poor nutrition (triplets/old ewes)



Coccidiosis is seen most frequently in lambs aged between 6-8 weeks old. Faecal egg counts can confirm the disease but must be sent to the laboratory to determine the species as not all strains cause disease. All lambs in the affected group should be treated with a coccidostat such as Vecoxan. Alternatively the in-feed coccidostat Deccox can be used where lambs receive creep feed.

Nematodirus is a worm that lives in the intestine and can cause a profuse black scour, poor growth and death of lambs. It can cause losses quickly, without much time for you to act, and spotting the early warning signs can be vital.

Risk factors to look out for:

- Lambs grazing pasture that was grazed by lambs the year before
- Cold weather followed by a sudden spell of warm weather
- Lambs eating sufficient grass (over 6 weeks old normally)
- Lambs with other challenges (e.g. triplets, fostered lambs or those born to older ewes)

As with Coccidiosis, faecal egg counts can confirm the diagnosis, but serious damage may occur before eggs are passed. The appropriate worming treatment is a white drench (e.g. Endospec 2.5% SC)

An update on Schmallenberg

The last few months have seen both bulk milk and individual animal blood samples test positive for Schmallenberg virus throughout the UK. This is in addition to confirmed cases in deformed foetuses. First recognised in 2011, Schmallenberg was originally associated with birth defects in lambs and calves, although it can cause a transient fever, milk drop and scour in cattle.



There are no published reports regarding specific calf abnormalities caused by the Schmallenberg virus but anecdotal reports describe calving difficulties caused by fused joints necessitating embryotomy or caesarean operation. Farmers must be aware that these abnormalities may arise whereby joints cannot be flexed to correct the position of the calf's legs.

It is important to be aware that the virus has been in the area and thus remain vigilant for signs of birth deformities when lambing or calving difficulties arise. An effective vaccine was quickly made available when Schmallenberg was first seen, however it is currently unavailable. As this is likely to be the case for the foreseeable future, control is difficult. **If you are concerned about Schmallenberg in your herd or flock it is worth speaking to us to discuss how a diagnosis may be confirmed or denied.**