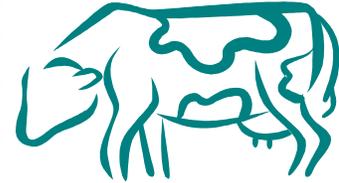




# FarmVets

S O U T H W E S T



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## Newsletter June 2014

### BULK MILK UREA LEVELS

Bulk milk urea levels are usually sent along with fat and protein results but are often ignored. This is probably because there is a lot of confusion over what levels are too high or too low and also about whether it really causes any problems anyway. The ways the results are displayed is also an issue. CIS and NMR don't have a common way of presenting the figures (e.g. a CIS figure of 200 is the same as an NML/NMR figure of 0.02). Sometimes you may even see "20" or "0.2" - it is very annoying!

It is clear from recent research that urea levels are important but in the past we tended to worry about them being too low, whereas now we are more concerned about the negative effects of them being too high. In the table below there is a comparison of what we used to consider as OK compared to a newer interpretation.

CIS	Low	Normal	High	NMR	Low	Normal	High
Old	<200	200-400	>400	Old	<0.02	0.02-0.04	>0.4
New	<60	60-180	>180	New	<0.006	0.006-0.018	>0.018

If your milk urea level is less than 60/0.006 then the rumen bugs could be struggling to get enough protein to digest forages properly resulting in lower dry matter intakes and production. This is not a common occurrence. It is more likely that urea levels will be too high. So, what is the problem with high urea levels? Firstly, you are wasting protein which is the expensive stuff you have in the cake/blend e.g. soya, rape and sunflower meal. Secondly, there is an energy cost to getting rid of excess protein which causes increased weight loss and reduced pregnancy rates.

Within our practice we currently have 44% of milk recording dairies with high urea levels, 48% are normal and 7% are low based on the "new" interpretation above. Interestingly, 100% of dairies have experienced high urea levels in the past 12 months and not always at turn-out when you might expect them.

It is, unfortunately, not always as simple (when is it ever?) as dropping or increasing protein in the diet but at least we have an indicator that something is not right. If you have concerns that your urea levels are too high or too low then please contact one of our offices for advice.

## Wet Weather Puts Calves at Risk of Coccidiosis this Spring

With the UK recovering from the wettest Winter on record and now basking in the relatively mild Spring weather, the perfect conditions have been created for coccidiosis to go into overdrive. Warm, wet conditions favour survival of the oocysts of the Eimeria parasite, so infection levels in calves could be high this Spring. What action should you be taking? Be on the lookout for a rise in cases of cocci within young calves at critical points this Spring and treat in time to avoid problems.

Weaning, castration, transport and turn out can all act as immune system stressors and trigger outbreaks of disease. A warmer Spring means a potential increase of oocysts in the environment, on pasture, in bedding and around areas such as feed troughs where calves mix in larger numbers.



Coccidiosis is recognised as a cause of scour in young livestock in the first few months of life and infection can produce a range of symptoms from ill-thrift and chronic scour to severe bloody diarrhoea and straining. It can even be fatal. The affected calf can have a dull appearance with sunken eyes and is often reluctant to eat or drink. As a consequence the calf can suffer severe dehydration and a loss of electrolytes, coupled with significant weight loss, that can result in death if not treated early. Sub-clinical disease is, however, a cause of significant economic loss, resulting in a large number of animals affected but with few obvious clinical signs. Please speak to us about reducing the risk of cocci on your farm and the use of Vecoxan.

## On our rounds.....Corein Selles



*Ears pointing backwards,  
mouth firmly shut*

A few weeks ago I was called out to a six month old bloated calf. Although the animal had been off colour for a few days it had still been eating and drinking but had suddenly become a lot worse. As I arrived the animal was walking stiffly and was very bloated. When examining it I tried to look in its mouth - but that stayed firmly shut (even after a couple of strenuous attempts on my part to prise it open). On further examination I noticed that the calf's ears were pointing backwards and that its third eyelids were showing. The tail was also carried high and was very stiff. All together these symptoms pointed to only one diagnosis - lockjaw (or tetanus if you prefer).

Normally animals get this disease after having cuts, superficial wounds or after castration. As this animal was a heifer, the last was definitely not the cause, and the disease must have come from a small cut. In the wound the tetanus bacteria had found a good place to grow and start producing their deadly toxins. These toxins circulate in the blood and find their way to the nervous system - causing the typical signs of tetanus. The prognosis for lockjaw is very poor but some do manage to survive. We decided to give it a go and placed a red devil to relieve the bloat and injected a high dose of penicillin as well as giving painkillers.

Unfortunately two days later the calf had become much worse and was now so stiff it was flat on the floor. To prevent any further suffering the decision was made to put the animal down.



*Red devil to relieve the bloat*