Herd Health Challenges Need Attention To Detail

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With severe grass tetany, animals will become stiff, go into tetany, and have convulsions which can result in death.

What is happening?

Magnesium is part of an enzyme that helps quiet nerves. If a signal is sent through a nerve to tell a muscle to contract, the nerve is then quieted and the signal is no longer sent.

Without this enzyme, simple movement will start muscle spasms and then convulsions.

It takes time for this enzyme to be made so a simple treatment of supplemental magnesium won't solve the problem today.

You should feed extra magnesium approximately two weeks before animals start grazing and continue feeding magnesium throughout spring grazing. Preventing grass tetany requires magnesium be fed in the form of magnesium oxide (MgO) at the following levels:

Cattle - 2 oz per head per day.

Sheep - 1/3 oz per head per day.

Laminitis (Founder)

Laminitis, or founder, as it is also known, is again caused by the rich digestible quality of spring pasture.

The quality is so good that it is almost like letting your animals eat unlimited grain. Animals that have a sudden increase of rich digestible feed in their gut also have an increase of lactic acid.

This increase in acid kills off many of the digestive bacteria normally found in the gut. When they die, they release an endotoxin.

The deadly combination of lactic acid and endotoxin moves throughout the body and hurts blood circulation.

Blood is shunted from the foot and sections die.

With mild cases, the hoof is very warm to the touch and the animal is reluctant to move. Severe cases of laminitis put the animal in agony.

In the severe cases, the bone separates from the hoof and can actually rotate and poke out the sole. The hoof weakens and deforms.

Ponies seem to be especially prone to suffering from laminitis. The best prevention of laminitis is making sure that animals are slowly adapted to spring pasture. Let them eat small amounts and slowly increase the amount they eat.

Spring pastures are excessively nutritious, readily digestible, palatable and an easy source of problems for your livestock.

Simple precautions will help prevent problems for your animals. Too much too soon will kill your animals.

Let them gradually eat more pasture over time, fill your animals up with poorly digestible hay so they can't gorge on pasture, pull them off pasture and put them in the barn until they are adapted to the new diet, feel their ears for cool body temperatures (grass tetany), check their manure to see that is isn't too loose and observe their actions, movement and behavior to make sure that they are acting normal.

Subtle changes are your first clue to problems. If you misjudged and didn't prevent the problem, at least treat the problem early on.

Displaced Abomasum

This past winter we seem to have had an unusually high occurrence of displaced abomasum (D.A.) in cattle. The abomasum is the fourth stomach (the "true" stomach) in the cow and it rests on the right side of the rumen.

It is possible for the abomasum to somehow slip under the rumen and get squeezed (called a "left D.A.", the most common form of a D.A.) or accidentally flip over on top of itself (this is called a "right D.A.", the less common form).

Usually you have to call your vet and have the problem corrected with surgery.

Normally a D.A. will occur in a cow shortly after calving because of all the changes she has gone through.

The large calf took up so much space in the cow that the abomasum got pushed forward and, after calving, it had room to accidentally move and become displaced.

This situation is made worse by a cow going off feed or eating too little fiber.

With less bulk in the gut, it is extremely easy for the abomasum to move around.

Feeding a high corn diet will result in more fermentable feed entering the abomasum and high amounts of volatile fatty acids (gas) collecting in there. These gases can fill up the abomasum and push it out of place, resulting in a D.A.

What about cows that have a D.A. during mid or late lactation?

The problems with freshening do not seem to apply to these cows, so why would they have a D.A.?

You have to review your farm situation and see if the conditions are similar to "freshening."

By that I mean did your cow go off feed for a few days? This is not typical for mid or late lactation cows (they are used to a lactation diet and love to eat!), but maybe something changed and there was less bulk in the gut which allowed the abomasum to move around.

Or possibly the cows selected the corn and avoided the fiber in their diet. In this situation there would be less bulk in the gut and more gas in the abomasum.

Have the Feeds Changed?

Last year we had record high yields with corn; corn silage could be lower in fiber.

Have your silage analyzed to know the true energy level and feed it appropriately.

Is your silage stored in a bunker silo? All the rain we have been getting this winter could dilute your silage. You may be feeding less fiber than you realize because you aren't adjusting for the added moisture.

Wet feeds can mold — could your feed have a mycotoxin? Cattle don't want to eat moldy feed, so that could cause a drop in feed intake. Mycotoxin can bring on all kinds of problems in addition to D.A.'s, so you should have your feeds analyzed for them as well.

1992 was a year when conditions were ideal for mycotoxin growth. We had a late harvest because of wet fields, lots of rain, and conditions that led to fusarium molds growing in the field and in the storage bin.

Common fusarium toxins are deoxynivalenol (DON or vomitoxin), zearalenone and fumonisin.

Look For a Pattern

Write down when cows were diagnosed with D.A.'s.

Did a large percentage of D.A.'s happen within the same time?

Were they all fresh cows or were they animals in different stages of production?

If you find that the problem lies with fresh cows, then you need to look at the dry cow management and group fresh cows so they get the special attention they need.

If, however, you discover that the D.A.'s are occurring at all different stages of production, then you need to monitor feed quality and feed intake.

Remember, cows can be on and off for weeks with a mild D.A. before the problem is serious. A slight displacement may correct itself, a severe displacement cannot.

Pa. FFA Members Prepare For Summer Convention

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — Members of the Pennsylvania FFA Association are preparing for the 64th State FFA Activities Week to be held June 15-17 at the Pennsylvania State University.

The general sessions will be held in Eisenhower Auditorium on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings at 7 p.m., and the final session is Thursday morning at 9:15 a.m.

More than 1,100 FFA members, advisors, and guests are expected to attend.

The convention will feature three general sessions with addresses by Marty Coates, a former national FFA officer, and former PA state officer Andy Rill. Recognition will be given to Honorary Keystone Degree recipients and Foundation award recipients. Top chapters in safety and overall chapter activities will also be recognized. In addition, the 1993-1994 State Officers will be elected and installed.

Other highlights will include participation in one of 26 career skill competitions, including prepared and extemporaneous public speaking, parliamentary procedure, land judging, and agricultural mechanics. Recreational activities provide members time to interact with fellow FFA members from across Pennsylvania. The public is invited to attend any of the general sessions. Courtesy Corps will be available to help seat guests.

The National FFA Organization is 401,574 members strong. High school students in the 7,456 chapters prepare for leadership and careers in the science, business, and technology of agriculture.