VOLUME 5 EDITION 9

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE

Livestock MATTERS

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Inside this issue:

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Excellence in Practice

EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

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Excellence in Practice

Invest in Health Don't Pay For Disease

The members of XLVets have worked hard to create what they see as a model of how practices can work together, by sharing experiences, knowledge and skills. We strive to deliver excellence in veterinary practice to our clients and their animals.

The group comprises of a number of the foremost farm practices in Ireland. With many years of combined experience, we are able to give expert advice on all areas of farm livestock, health and production.

XLVets member practices are dedicated to providing a high quality, cost effective service to their clients, to support long-term growth and future prosperity within the Irish livestock industry.

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XLVets are all independently owned, progressive veterinary practices located throughout Ireland committed to working together for the benefit of our clients.

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CONTENTS

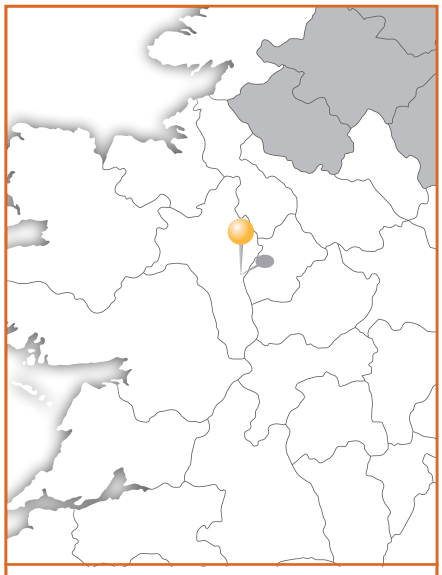
XLVets Skillnet launch new website

XL Vets Skillnet

Launched in 2011, XLVets Skillnet is a learning network supporting the training needs of the veterinary and farming sectors in Ireland. Our objective is to promote growth and sustainability by offering flexible, practical training programmes that are relevant and tailored to the needs of both sectors.

This June, we launch our new website. Our new members area gives members exclusive 24/7 access to our FREE online training Agri Academy, we have 4 modules already available with more to follow in 2019. These online modules were created to address the animal health training needs of livestock farmers are delivered by veterinary experts.

Visit us on www.xlvetsskillnet.ie



Veterinary Surgeon Donal Flynn

XLVets Practice All Creatures Veterinary, Lanesboro, Co. Roscommon

DONAL FLYNN, MVB

Donal explains what is involved in the Sheep Knowledge Transfer Programme and discusses some of the outcomes for his clients

Outcomes of the Sheep Knowledge Programme

The Sheep Knowledge Transfer (KT) Programme was one of several 3-year KT Programmes financed under the Rural Development Programme (RDP). Sheep is one of 6 Sectors in the Programme along with Beef, Dairy Equine, Poultry and Tillage. Participants can join groups in 2 different sectors.

Under the sheep KT Programme farmers were in groups of between 12 and 18, attended 5 meetings per year (combination of local and national meetings) and completed a FIP (Farm Improvement Plan) led by an approved facilitator. Each of the following 4 should be completed in year 1 and updated annually.

The FIP included;

1. E- Profit monitor
2. Animal health measures
3. Grassland management plan
4. Carbon navigator

The role of the Private Veterinary Practitioner (PVP)

The PVP role was in the animal health measures. The aim of the KT Programme is to ultimately increase profitability and improve environmental impact of the farm.

The PVP carries out an on-farm risk assessment and based on findings will advise on different actions the farmer can engage in to improve on any findings.

The risk assessment is carried out under the following 4 areas;

1. Flock health and production
2. Lameness
3. Parasite control
4. Biosecurity

Flock health and production

Under this section the vet and farmer looked at Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) on the farm, and then compared them to target/ideal numbers.

Some of our farmers met these targets but many didn't, and often many weren't aware of what the target numbers were;

- Ewe mortality <2%
- Abortions <3%
- Lamb mortality <7%
- Litter size >1.65
- Lambs weaned >1.45

Once we knew what the targets were, we could then decide if and where intervention was required.

Some common threads we found that improved those KPI's were;

- Keeping accurate and complete records
- Scanning ewes so you can draft for feeding and lambing. You can compare scanning rate with other lambs born/ weaned and sold to see exactly where losses were
- DLWG (Daily Live Weight Gain). Weigh lambs regularly to assess their progress through the year. This is often a strong indicator of other problems e.g. Parasites, lameness
- Early diagnosis of problems; ewe abortions, lamb disease
- Vaccination as a preventative is way more cost effective than treatment

Parasite Control

Parasite control was a big discussion on our farms. Knowing when there was a problem, when to dose, what to dose with, and effective pasture management.

Again using a few standard protocols, we addressed the following issues on most farms.

- Keeping records. Knowing the previous dosing history and record of previous egg counts of different parasites on the farm
- Use of FEC (faecal egg counts) to determine when it is necessary to dose
- Use DLWG and FEC to determine effectiveness of dosing strategies
- Use the correct anthelmintic at the correct dose at the correct time with the correct procedure and equipment
- Quarantine dose protocol for all bought in animals
- Good pasture management and refugia protocols

Lameness

Lameness problems again appeared as a concern on many of our farms. After assessing a number of sheep the prevalence of lameness was determined. The target was to have less than 5% prevalence. Once it crosses this figure intervention will reap rewards. Lameness in sheep can directly affect the flock production, as it can lead to up to 20% reduction in the on farm lambing numbers through issues like decreased BCS, resulting in early lamb mortality, decreased conception rates. Also DLWG will be lower in affected lambs. Again, standardising the following protocols on farm helps reduce the problem;

- Diagnose the cause, CODD, scald, foot rot, toe granuloma, foot abscess Flocks often had a number of these conditions simultaneously
- Treat promptly with correct treatment based on diagnosis; antibiotic injection, sprays and footbaths
- Isolate all lame sheep away from the main flock and do not mix with the herd again until at least 21days sound. This helps to halt the spread among the flock
- Cull chronic problems. These are chronic carriers of disease and keep them circulating within the herd. Any animal requiring a 3rd intervention should be tagged for culling

- Vaccination protocol - aids in control and spread but only if the previous protocols are implemented as well

Biosecurity

This looked at stopping disease coming in to your herd and containing the spread of any disease in the herd through biosecurity and hygiene measures. The main risks we found were;

- Animals are the main source of disease. Quarantine protocols for bought in animals, and fencing to prevent contact with neighbouring animals
- People were another source of infection. Minimise visitors on farm and have proper disinfection protocols in place that are followed
- Machinery and equipment - Sharing equipment and contractors can bring in disease
- Hygiene – ensure high standards especially around lambing to prevent spread of disease

We found in general sheep farmers really engaged with the on farm risk assessment. Many carried out good protocols on farm but were very willing to improve where needed. Keeping good and accurate records was seen as a simple but very effective start on every farm.

Ultimately it is about achieving a more profitable farm. This will be achieved through more lambs sold per ewe and decreased cost per animal on farm, both of which can be achieved simultaneously through having proper achievable protocols in place.

On top of this decreased antibiotic/ anthelmintic usage and improved environmental impact of the farm will follow suit.

Veterinary Surgeon Brian Flynn

XLVets Practice Longford Animal Health Centre, Shroid, Co. Longford

BRIAN FLYNN MVB

We discuss ineffective parasitic control and give tips on how to avoid parasites eating away at your profit

Parasite Control – Calf to Beef

With margins in calf to beef enterprises coming under sustained pressure it has never been as important to maximise performance from the inputs used. Ineffective parasitic control is still is one of the main reasons for these animals not hitting their expected targets.

1st Grazing Season

Calves whether bucket feed or suckling will be exposed to pastures contaminated with gut worm and lungworm larvae. The level of contamination depends on stocking density and weather conditions. In cold weather these larvae are tucked away at the bottom of the sward but as the temperature increases in late Spring and Summer the larvae migrate to the top of the sward where these young animals ingest them.

Wet weather is required for the larvae to leave the dung and spread throughout the pasture. It's important to note that a small infestation of these worms in a young small animal can cause disease.

It's very important to treat these animals regularly during their first grazing season. However, the timing of these treatments is crucial and will vary greatly from year to year depending on weather conditions and from farm to farm depending on grazing practices and land type.

Waiting for animals to show clinical signs of these infestations could be reducing their overall performance and treating them blindly could be a waste of time and money.

1st Housing

Weanlings being housed need to go into the shed with the cleanest lungs as possible. Lungworm will damage the lungs and leave them more susceptible to disease from viruses and bacteria when housed so its important they get a worm dose before housing.

Lice and mange will cause lack of performance and these need to be monitored and treated.

This is the best time to address liver & rumen fluke if present on the farm. Deciding when to treat and what product to use will depend on weather conditions, previous history (high liver score from factory), time of housing and dung sample results.

2nd Grazing Season

Animals don't need as much dosing as in their first grazing season. Again, treatment will depend on weather conditions and stocking density. Dung samples should be carried out before treatment and again after treatment if the expected results weren't achieved to check for drug resistance.

On farms where fluke is a problem a fluke dose maybe required. Dung samples may not be as reliable in fluke infestations as the animal has to be infected for 10 weeks before eggs are passed in the dung.

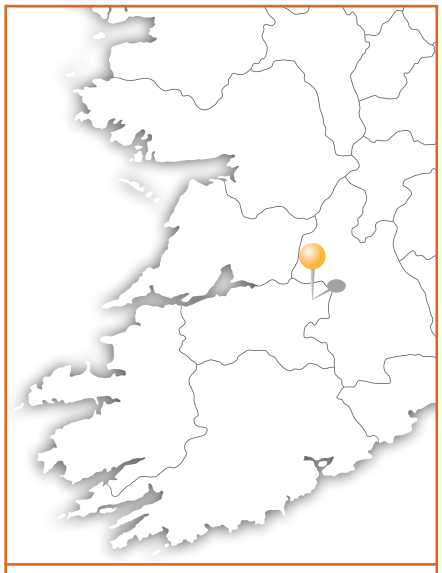
2nd Housing

Some animals will be fattened off grass but a lot more will be housed to fatten. With the huge cost inputs of concentrates it's important that parasites aren't the ones getting fattened.

Conclusion

In parasitic control there is no one size fits all. In our practice the KT scheme has greatly increased the awareness of the cost effectiveness of using a knowledge-based parasite control strategy.

Your local vet is best equipped to advise you on the right time and the best products to use to ensure poor parasitic control doesn't eat away at your profit.



Veterinary Surgeon	Steph Downer
XLVets Practice	Mulcair Veterinary, Cappamore, Co. Limerick

STEPH DOWNER BVSc

Steph tells us about here experience of Irish veterinary and farming and how it compares it to her native New Zealand

Farming and veterinary in Ireland, the Kiwi perspective

Rewind to a little over a year ago and I was about to get my first taste of the large animal veterinary scene in Ireland. Starting just before the busy spring period is no way to ease yourself into a new job, in a new country, but sink or swim as they say, and I seemed to have survived thus far—if only just.

I had to learn the 'farmer' language and tune in my hearing to decipher any part of the country accent. Without a little warning from my colleagues I wouldn't have a clue what was going on. From crubeens, to vessels, starts and dugs, a murren?! Where I'm from beastings are from honey producing insects and a puss is a 4-legged creature that sleeps on the sofa and catches the odd mouse!

As it turns out, it was one of the worst Winter/Spring periods in modern history, with exceptional challenges faced upon farmers. With the fodder crisis and the ensuing health issues as a result of the prolonged time indoors and inclement weather, everyone was under pressure and vets were up the walls. 'Giving out' about my lack of sleep from the strenuous out of hours work mattered little to anyone but myself. On the flip side of that was the hottest Summer of the half-century and a new word entered country folk vocabulary—"drought." Speaking from this area, this Irish 'drought' and the droughts I have experienced back home are not comparable. None the less, these unforeseeable occurrences remind us that Mother Nature rules the roost and we should always take heed of the five P's—prior planning prevents poor performance.

The housing of animals during the Winter was something I was not used to. Kiwi cows (and sheep) are in the field all year round across most of the country, with only a few indoor-outdoor systems, typically in the far south. Outside meant calving, the lot. No bedded houses; you might be born in the rain, in a puddle, up to your eyeballs in mud, tough luck.

Housing cows comes with its own challenges, with hygiene and protecting cows from mastitis a number one priority in the dairy scene. Safe to say, I had never diagnosed a cow with E. coli mastitis and never given a hypertonic 'salt' drip, until I entered the country.

Similarly, farming was mirrored on a grass-based system but with less harvesting and more grazing, being outdoors year-round. I feel that the consistency of the post-calving diet, likely coupled with our smaller cow type, lead to the rarity of displaced stomachs (LDAs and RDAs) in NZ. In fact, I'd never seen a proper case back home and it's a new surgical skill I've picked up along route.

We would experience similar challenges with scour in young calves (crypto, rotavirus, coccidiosis), but 'full,' 'acidotic' calves were non-existent, and you wouldn't find an empty drip bag in sight. Pneumonia cases were isolated events and if someone had told me they were giving a vaccine up the nose I might have wondered what planet they were on?!

In New Zealand, a typical year in the veterinary calendar would look something like this. Scan thousands of cows. Dry cow consults and prescription meetings with farmers. Herd vaccinations. Calve cows. Fetotomy (saw up dead calf) over a section. Many rotten—smell bad. Disbud calves. Calve more cows. Metrichecking. Pre-mating plans. Examine non-cyclers—plenty of CIDRs (Controlled Internal Drug Release). Calf vaccines. Repeat. Scan thousands of cows…and amongst it attend to the various health issues on-farm, with a lot more sunshine and a lot less rain (generally). Sick animals do not all get shot as I have been asked on numerous occasions.

I would give credit to the availability of industry led disease/health management plans in place here. From IBR, Johnes, BVD, to dry cow consults and KTs, all with associated funding. I would encourage you all to make the most of these, to get ahead of the game—they are invaluable to you the farmer. The funding will not last forever and one day you will be expected to foot the entire cost yourself.

Differences aside, no matter where you go, the fundamentals of veterinary and farming remain the same. Doing the basics well and prevention, rather than cure, are big pets of mine. I was recently asked if I thought Ireland have gone 'overkill' on the vaccine front…see previous statement. That aside, vaccination is an aid in prevention and is certainly not a substitute for good animal husbandry.

The dairy industry worldwide is becoming more and more of a numbers game. The goal for us all, as vets, advisers and farmers is to ensure the balance between animal health and welfare, sustainability, profitability, and production.

Veterinary Surgeon Padraig Finan

XLVets Practice Glen Vets,
Tipperary Town, Co. Tipperary

Why?

Key benefit:
To improve herd performance by identifying problem cows early, treating successfully and as a result reducing the costs of unnecessary culling

Other benefits:
- To determine the stage of oestrus cycle for each cow
- To shorten calving intervals on late cows
- To obtain an overall view of herd performance
- To select cows for expensive AI semen

When?

Herds calving in February would ideally like all their cows ready for breeding by the 1st of May. Thus, a pre-breeding scan at the end of April should be a sufficient amount of time to identify problem cows and treat them successfully.

Tail painting in April can be a useful tool to select cows for a pre-breeding scan if scanning all of them is not an option.

Common problems that can be identified

The pre-breeding scan consists of checking the quality of the endometrium, determining the stage of the oestrus cycle, and identifying cows with anoestrus and/or infection.

PADRAIG FINAN DVM

As the calving season comes to a close, it's time to start thinking about the breeding season ahead. Scanning cows before breeding will give you the information you need to maximise herd health and efficiency, which will ensure a compact calving season for 2020.

What can a Pre-Breeding Scan do for your Herd?

When conducting the pre-breeding scan, the veterinarian will be scanning for one of the four types of anoestrus mentioned below:
Definitions:
Oestrus – Heat or "bulling"
Anoestrus – A cow that has not displayed heat
Endometrium – Lining of the uterus

Factors predisposing to Anoestrus:
- Milk fever
- Retained placenta
- Negative energy balance
- Low BCS
- Mastitis
- Lameness

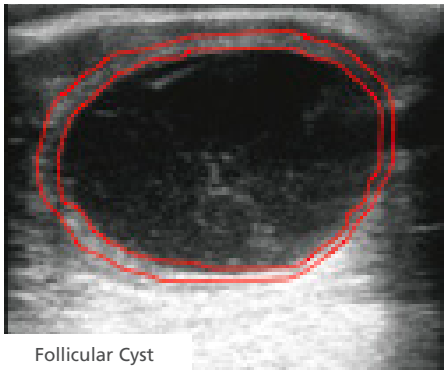
Type of Anoestrus	Definition/Cause	Treatment
1	Inactive ovaries (no follicular growth) – normally due to low BCS and negative energy balance	Improve BCS
2	Follicular growth but no ovulation	Hormonal Treatment
3	Ovarian cysts	Hormonal Treatment
4	Endometritis	Antimicrobial & Hormonal Treatment

The two most common types of anoestrus would be type three and four.

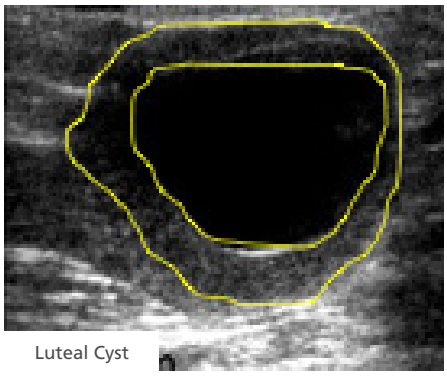
Type 3

Cysts will result from abnormal follicular growth; there are two main types of cysts, **follicular** and **luteal**. The latter may be treated using prostaglandin followed by GnRH while the follicular type will require an intra-vaginal device followed by a prostaglandin.

High producing herds tend to encounter this problem more than others, when there are 10% or more diagnosed it is considered a herd issue.



Follicular Cyst



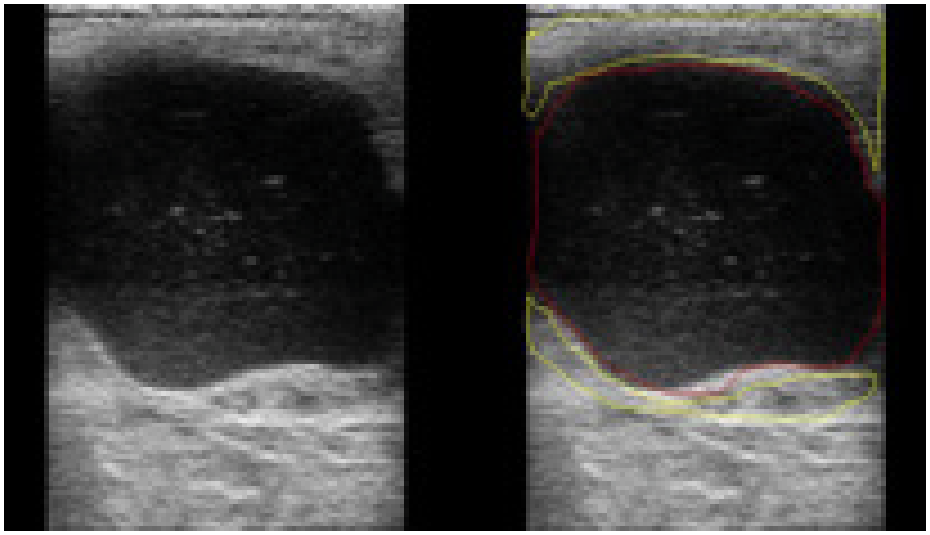
Luteal Cyst

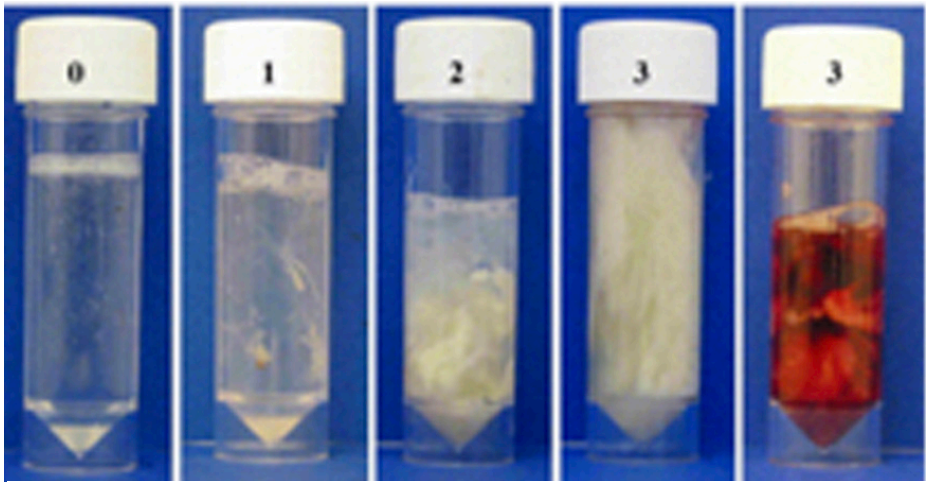
Type 4

Endometritis, an infection of the uterus, can be a common occurrence after calving. There are varying degrees of infection, ranging from clinical cases that are symptomatic, to mild, subclinical cases that can be detected on a pre-breeding scan.

Treatment of such cases involves hormonal intervention to open the cervix and the use of systemic or local antimicrobials depending on the severity of the case.

As long as there is an infection in the uterus, implantation of an embryo cannot follow through.





Endometritis Scoring Scheme

Identifying the Stage of Oestrus Cycle

When examining the ovary during the scan, the veterinarian can identify if the cow has cycled and roughly when her next cycle is due. This can help farmers catch cows with silent heats by monitoring them more closely at the time her next cycle is estimated.

Choosing cows for expensive AI semen

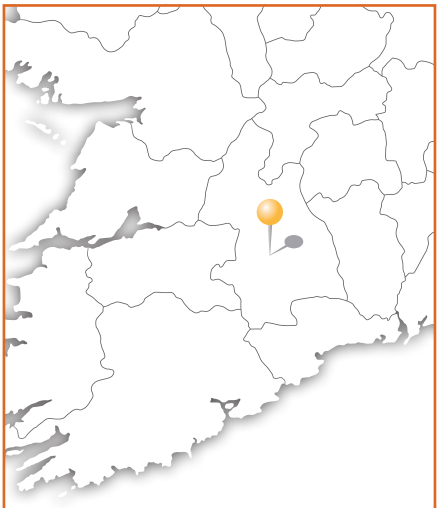
Farmers focusing on breeding and using more sought after semen will want to minimise wastage. A pre-breeding scan confirming a healthy reproductive tract will minimise this wastage on repeat breeders or problem cows.

Shortening the Calving interval for late Cows

Cows calving late in the year can be brought forward using hormonal protocols, this can be achieved as soon as 35 days post - partum. A pre-breeding scan is a useful tool in shortening the interval, as it will identify cows that are suitable for this synchronization.

Conclusion

The aim is to improve overall herd performance and give farmers a smooth and compact breeding season. A pre-breeding scan could be the key to unlocking your herds full potential



Veterinary Surgeon Tom Julian

XLVets Practice O Connor Julian Veterinary, Cashel, Co Tipperary

TOM JULIAN MVB

We Discuss how to minimise the risk of serious financial loss associated with an outbreak of Mycoplasma

Mycoplasma Bovis- The Underdiagnosed Disease

A few weeks ago, I got a call from a very distressed farmer; he had 5 cows that were not responding to treatment for mastitis. I knew this warranted a prompt investigation as the farmer said he had a few more problems which he had not seen before.

On arrival I examined the 5 cows, took milk samples, blood samples and did a California Milk Test (CMT) on milk samples. The milk samples all looked unusual when they had settled in the sampling pots.

The farmer then showed me two cows that had sore legs; both were sore low down on the fetlock of the front legs, and the farmer thought they had got caught on cubicles. Alarm bells went off straight away and I asked what he was doing with the waste milk. Unfortunately, the farmer told me he was feeding it to the calves.

On examination of the calves I discovered some of the older calves with joint ill. There was no evidence of naval infection in any of these calves. I took some joint swabs from both the calves and cows. Every sample I took was confirmed positive for mycoplasma bovis in the lab. The calves had joint ill, having been infected with mycoplasma orally in the waste milk. I explained to the farmer that this is one reason why waste milk/antibiotic milk should never be fed to calves; it is just too risky. The joint infections in the cows were also due to mycoplasma.

Mycoplasma is the most underdiagnosed disease in Ireland in my experience. It has been difficult to isolate when we submitted samples to laboratories in the past, but diagnostic testing has significantly improved in the past few years I would urge every dairy and beef farmer to take some samples, milk or blood to check if there is evidence of infection in their herds. It is better to know if the disease is present in your herd, as it will assist in evidence-based decision making if a problem occurs.

On further investigation of the herd in question, I discovered there was a cow with an LDA one month previously to the outbreak. That cow was identified as a mycoplasma carrier and when she was immunosuppressed with the LDA, she shed the disease and spread it to the rest of the herd.

In some countries such as New Zealand, the national policy is now that the entire herd is culled if Mycoplasma is diagnosed.

The plan for this farm was to cull the 5 cows with mastitis, treat the lame cows and see how they respond, and to treat the calves with joint infections

This outbreak is going to have serious financial implications going forward due to the increase in culling rates.

If you are concerned about the risk of Mycoplasma in your herd, talk to your local vet, and get some samples taken. The results will influence choice of antibiotic therapy if the disease occurs as well as husbandry practices, in particular in relation to feeding waste milk to calves. It is always better to know what disease agents you are dealing with in your herd, and having treatment & prevention protocols in place, to help minimise the risk of serious financial loss associated with an outbreak of Mycoplasma.

Agri Academy

XL Vets Skillnet

Agri Academy is an online learning platform created by XLVets to address the animal health training needs of livestock farmers.

The goal of Agri Academy is to pool the knowledge and experience of the XLVets network and to translate that into practical, relevant and easy to watch training for farmers.

Modules are delivered by industry experts. Each module is broken down into easy to watch bite-sized videos which can be accessed from your PC or on the go through your mobile.

Module 1
The essentials of good medicine management on farm
Delivered by Conor Geraghty

Module 2
Pneumonia: Reduce the financial impact in your herd this Winter
Delivered by Donal Lynch

Module 3
Best Practice in Drying Off Cows
Delivered by Conor Geraghty

Module 4
Lameness - Reduce the incidents in your herd
Delivered by Ger Cusack

To access this FREE online training, register by visiting the XLVets Skillnet website

www.xlvetsskillnet.ie

From here you also have access to our library of online resources which includes press articles, videos and newsletters.

XL Vets Skillnet

Delivering practical training designed to improve animal health and sustainability in Irish farming

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Consistently delivering the highest standards of animal care and health management through veterinary excellence

XL Vets Skillnet is co-funded by Skillnet Ireland and member companies. Skillnet Ireland is funded from the National Training Fund through the Department of Education and Skills.

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
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