

NAVAN VETERINARY SERVICES – MAY 2013 NEWSLETTER

Part of your annual Grade A inspection beginning May 1, 2013 will involve having your vet sign a declaration that the cows in your herd are in good health, cows that require attention are receiving satisfactory care and medicines are being used in an appropriate manner. One issue in regards to cow health that requires our continued attention is lameness.

Lameness continues to be an ongoing concern in our dairy herds. It seems that rarely a day goes by that we are not treating, discussing prevention or witnessing new cases of lameness. In general terms, lameness can be classified as infectious or non-infectious. The infectious ones are probably the most familiar to us as they are fairly easy to recognize. Strawberry or Italian foot rots are usually surface infections but are extremely painful and have a particular foul odour. Deeper infections of pasture and stable foot rot are equally foul smelling. Usually involving necrotic heel tissue. Infections that invade even deeper structures of the foot will result in swollen pasterns and fetlocks. These often require systemic antibiotics to help with healing.

Super foot rots are recently described infections that cause severe swelling of the foot and are more difficult to get under control with traditional antibiotics. Fortunately most infectious causes of lameness are still very sensitive to the tetracycline group of antibiotics and those drugs along with proper trimming of unhealthy infected tissue, results in a favourable outcome. The trick to success is early and thorough treatment. Do not allow the infection to become deep seated. The topical antibiotics need to achieve contact with the bacteria in the case of Strawberry or Italian foot rot. If you are treating the lesions with poor success, it is likely that you are simply not getting good contact with the entire lesion. Bandaging of these lesions are absolutely unnecessary, but if you are wrapping these feet, remove the bandage in 2-3 days.

Sole ulcers are responsible for the majority of the non-infectious causes of lameness in our cows. These lesions are some of the most painful debilitating foot problems we see. Ulcers usually occur at the junction of the heel-sole area, but can also occur at the heel or toe itself. Regardless of where it occurs, ulcers are a result of pressure damage to the underlying corium of the sole. Weakening of the support structures of PIII (the last bone inside the claw) and softening of the connective tissue supporting PIII cause it to sink and exert pressure on the sole from within, whenever the cow puts weight on the foot.

Although not fully understood, we do know that chemical changes occur in the sensitive parts of the feet as a result of some toxins. Cows with SARA (sub-acute rumen acidosis) will produce toxins that can initiate these chemical and physical changes in the feet. Other toxins from severe mastitis and metritis are thought to have the same effect.

Treating sole ulcers involves a two-step approach. The first is careful, tapered trimming around the lesion. This takes pressure off of the damaged corium and helps with pain. The second step is aimed at removing the weight bearing pressure off of the lesion. If that can be done by corrective trimming, that is preferred. If that is not possible, cow slips or shoes are absolutely necessary. Applying the shoe to the healthy claw for 3-4 weeks is ideal. At 4 weeks, the ulcerated claw needs to be re-examined and the shoe removed to examine the healthy side. If the ulcer is not completely healed, the shoe can be re-applied for another month.

These lesions are difficult to heal, particularly if left too long before treatment is started. Despite treatment, many cows remain chronic and require more frequent foot care if she is to remain in the herd.

As more and more attention is being made to animal care and welfare, it is incumbent (and demanded) on us to address all sources of stress and pain in animals under our care, of which lameness is one. We need to be proactive.