

FARM PRACTICE NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2011

Less pain, more gain



Practice News!

We are very pleased to announce that Tom Oxtoby has become a Cattle Partner-there's no escaping us now Tom!

Additionally, we would like to congratulate Tim Hirst and Ian Illingworth for passing their Cattle Health and Productivity Certificate, both have worked extremely hard and it is a fantastic achievement for both of them. Sadly since then we have bid goodbye to Ian- he will be sorely missed and we wish him and his wife Katie all the best in the future.

We would also like to welcome new vet Kathryn Hart to the practice, I'm sure you will all make her feel welcome.

And lastly, Cathy Morris will be running an AI course from the 29th Nov until 1st Dec, numbers are limited so please contact Val or Emma in the farm office if you are interested. 01666 823035.

Talking amongst the vets in the office on the use of pain relief has highlighted the fact that vets perceive pain or levels of pain in cattle differently. I am sure this is the same for farmers. The use of pain relieving drugs in cattle has increased hugely over past decades as more drugs have become available and we have learnt more about how and when cattle feel pain. As important as it is to continue the development of preventative medicine and whole herd health planning, the treatment of the individual cow and specifically providing pain relief for that cow should not be lost in the process.



Cattle Welfare

The welfare of cattle is protected by The Animal Welfare Act 2006. The act states that owners and keepers are responsible for the welfare of the animals they keep. Within this, it is assumed that the animal will be provided with a suitable environment to live in, a suitable diet, have the ability to express normal behaviour, to be housed with or without animals as appropriate and to be protected from **pain**, injury and disease.

The actual use of pain relieving drugs in the DEFRA guidelines is vague. However, they labour the point that animals that appear to be ill or injured should be cared for ASAP and that pain should be controlled

Pain

The feeling of pain is caused by chemical, mechanical or thermal stimulation of nociceptors- special receptors that respond to potentially damaging stimuli. Chronic pain as caused by persistently lame cows or long term pneumonia causes persistent activation of pain fibres which increases the animal's pain threshold, therefore the site of injury/stimuli are perceived as more painful than would be normal for that animal- this is termed **hyperalgesia**. Administration of Non Steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs), such as Metacam, Rimadyl and Flunixin have been shown to significantly reduce levels or duration of hyperalgesia.

Classically, cattle have always been considered as 'stoical' animals. Being a prey animal, they are evolutionarily designed to mask pain as a defence mechanism. The fact that a cow masks pain does not mean it is **NOT** in pain. Therefore, identifying pain on farm is essential.

Signs of pain

Decreased movement

Standing apart from the rest of the herd

Decreased appetite or looking 'hollow'

Altered mental state, 'quiet', dropped ears

Increased respiration- 'blowing' or 'panting'

Do we care enough?

A study carried out on the perception of pain amongst vets varied, showing that some practitioners tend to shy away from pain relief, believing that drugs mask the progression of disease and encourage excessive movements that could further damage the animal. Other vets were shown to be more likely to give pain relief in order to help the healing process and shorten the recovery time.

The same study suggested that women are more likely to give pain relief than men; I'm going to gloss over that one!

A survey of UK cattle vets asked them to score procedures on how painful they thought they were. Amongst those thought to be the most painful were digit amputation, LDA surgery, acute E coli mastitis and difficult calvings. Do the farmers agree?

My opinion is that if something is 'wrong' with a cow, whether it be lameness, mastitis or infectious disease or something is happening to the cow such as calving or surgery then chances are she will be experiencing pain on some level.



Therefore the use of pain relieving drugs can only be beneficial in improving her quality of life and quickening her journey to recovery.

Mastitis and Pain

Several studies have been done in recent years on the use of pain relief in mastitis.

One such study showed that cows with mastitis often displayed signs such as less time eating/cud chewing and lying down. Diagnostically they had fewer rumen contractions and high temperatures. This shows that mastitis alters physical behaviour and causes systemic changes- both of which are indications of pain. NSAIDs decrease rectal temperatures, decrease signs of inflammation, maintain rumen motility and reduce heart rate- thus relieving pain.

The vets in the survey mentioned earlier graded mastitis with just clots in milk as 2/10 on the pain scale and acute E Coli mastitis as 7/10. This indicates that they believed even **mild mastitis** would cause cows **discomfort**.

A further study showed that cows with mastitis had an increased pain response in the udder region- even when mastitis is only mild. Sensitivity to pain was reduced when mild mastitis cases were treated with a single dose of IV Flunixin. The study also showed that after a single dose of Flunixin, some cows reverted back to showing signs of pain at 24 post treatment- i.e. when the Flunixin would be starting to wear off. Do we need to increase the length of time we provide pain relief for?



Lastly, trials on the use of Metacam in cows with mastitis has shown significant benefits such as **reduced SCC** and **culling rates** in those cows receiving treatment.

I hope you are all well and ready for the coming winter.

Best wishes,

Bea.

Bull for Sale

Pedigree '**Smiddiehill Galactica**' Holstein bull for sale.

3 years old, out of Joylan Durham Glora (Ex 92) by September Storm (Ex).

Farm free from BVD, IBR, Lepto and clear TB test. Bull only for sale as he will be serving his daughters.

Please contact David on 07973139619.