

St Davids Farm Newsletter

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Use Orbeseal to dramatically reduce mastitis cases

Mastitis, as we all know, is a farmer's nightmare resulting at best in reduced milk production and increased vets bills – and at worst in culling.

It is often far too late to try to cure the problem once the symptoms have appeared (i.e. in early lactation) as over half of all mastitis cases start during the dry period – although you will not see signs until the cow is actually lactating.

These are the cases – that is, over half of your mastitis cases – that Orbeseal has been designed to prevent. It has proved to be so successful that we feel that we must explain a little more about how it works to anybody out there who has not yet tried it.

All of you already use Antibiotic Dry Cow Tubes (DCTs) and most of you understand that the tubes are inserted at drying-off in order to kill-off bacteria already present in the teat. This has been successful to varying degrees in reducing cases of mastitis – we are certainly not suggesting that this practice should be discontinued or replaced.

However, we have always known that DCTs have limitations. They are not effective against 100% of bacteria, for instance, and they cannot cope with constant re-introduction of new bacteria. This is where Orbeseal takes over – by preventing the entry of new bacteria after the insertion of the tubes.

During the dry period, cows should form a natural keratin plug which closes-off the teat to infection. Unfortunately, many cows do not do this efficiently with the result that bacteria manage to

enter the teat and overcome the resistance of the antibiotics which were really only put there to combat already-existing bacteria.

Orbeseal could be described as an imitation keratin plug – it is a viscous paste which is injected into the teat canal after the last milking and after the infusion of the DCT. Orbeseal doesn't solidify but retains a gummy consistency enabling it to mould itself into all the internal nooks and crannies of the teat, thus forming a near-perfect barrier to the bacteria which cause mastitis.



Hygiene is of the utmost importance in administering both the DCTs and Orbeseal – and Pfizer have produced a useful brochure setting out, amongst other things, simple-to-follow steps so that your chances of success are high.

I hope that this has explained how Orbeseal, used in conjunction with DCTs, could dramatically reduce your mastitis cases – in fact, by over 50% ! For those who like to read actual percentages and to look at graphs and charts – give the practice a ring and we will send out an Orbeseal brochure.

Digital dermatitis

As housing approaches we are seeing an increase in the level of Digital Dermatitis – DD. This is the most common cause of lameness in housed cows and prevention must be started now before housing.

DD lesions

DD is an infectious condition of the skin. Typically lesions are seen on the skin between the bulbs of the heels – they present as a red raw area of skin. As it progresses it becomes white/crusty. It is extremely painful and causes acute lameness. Treatment of these cases is by cleaning the lesion off and applying topical antibiotics to the lesion. They will respond quickly if treated early.

It can also occur between the claws and on the front of the interdigital cleft. These lesions can involve the coronary band, disrupt horn growth and leave the cow with a vertical crack that will never grow out.



Predisposing factors

The main predisposing factor to DD is exposure to slurry. Cows with dry feet will not be infected. Constant exposure to slurry compromises the normal skin protective barriers and allows infection to become established. Thus...



1. Cubicle housed cows are more likely to be infected as they will have more exposure to slurry.
2. Heifers are affected as they are generally loose housed pre calving and thus face a high challenge when entering the herd. Also heifers are at the bottom of the “pecking order”. Thus they will spend more time standing – waiting to enter the parlour, waiting for feed access, not used to cubicles – and will this be exposed more to the effects of standing in slurry.
3. Freshly calved cows will be infected as they are generally loose housed or housed outdoor where feet are drier. Another predisposing factor is the immune suppression associated with calving. This, combined with the effect of slurry on the skin, will leave them more susceptible to infection.

Prevention of DD

Prevention is essential. By the time you see lame cows there will be a high level of infection in the herd.

Slurry is the main predisposing factor. Thus any prevention must be based on reducing the exposure to slurry. Good regular scraping of cubicles and feed areas. Good maintenance of floors so

that slurry does not accumulate in puddles. Do not overstock – provide enough cubicle space so that cows are not standing too much. Good ventilation will help to keep buildings dry.

Regular foot bathing is the main means of prevention – it will not work by itself if there are too many predisposing factors. If we footbath before lesions are widespread then a simple disinfectant footbath should be sufficient – this can contain circulation wash, Virkon or Formalin. Frequency is important – once a fortnight is not sufficient. 7 days on, 7 days off is one routine. It is important that the dry cows are included in this routine. Footbaths should be made up fresh every day.

Antibiotic footbaths may be necessary if there is a high level of infection in the herd. These are off licence and must be used carefully on the advice of your veterinary surgeon.

Prevention is the key. Looking at the predisposing factors on your farm and then forming an action plan will help in control. Foot bathing is key to prevention and treatment but it will not solve the problem by itself.

Winter feeding

It's going to be an interesting winter. Many first cut silages were cut later than ideal due to weather constraints early on. The result has been that much first cut grass silage has produced unexciting analyses. In general they are high in dry matter (70% is my highest dry matter so far), high in fibre, and lower in energy and protein than one would hope.

This poses some questions as regards winter diets and resultant cow performance. High fibre means that rumen health and butterfat should be good. Careful attention will be needed to replace the shortfall in energy and protein in diets. The energy element will be especially important in order to maintain cow condition, milk proteins and perhaps most crucially of all, fertility performance.

However, I feel that the most significant issue to address will be achieving sufficient intakes with such dry forage. This will be especially the case if extra concentrated feed is required to boost energy and protein, as this will further dry out rations. After all, how many "cream crackers" can you eat?



Brewers grains are a by product of beer production and make an excellent supplement in beef and dairy feed rations

So, what can be done to help achieve an increase in intakes?

- Where maize is grown, some has been deliberately cut slightly "greener" to help moisten the forage mix, though this opportunity has passed for the majority, with much of the crop already harvested.
- Brewers grains inclusion in diets will help reduce overall dry matter and will generally help promote intakes in normal circumstances. The potential problem with this will be getting a consistent supply, as demand has been firm through the summer months and could well remain so through the winter.

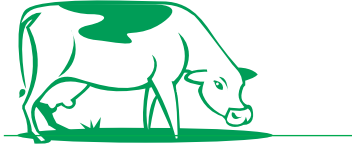


- Be aware that some other "forage extenders/replacers" are quite high in dry matter (50%+) and this may only compound the problem.
- Molasses will help through palatability improvement and will help reduce ration sorting, but again, remember that molasses is 75% dry matter! Some lower dry matter products are available, but will contain less sugar.
- Adding water to mixed rations could be an option in some cases. The rate will depend on the severity of the problem. Be aware though that this can tend to make the mix deteriorate faster than usual.

What if I'm still struggling with intakes and performance?

- Increasing the energy density of the ration will increase total energy intake. Dry, fibrous forage will mean more high energy cereals can be incorporated with less risk of detriment to rumen health.
- Consider feeding Megalac protected fat for a "big hit" of energy. 0.5kg/cow/day will provide energy for an extra three litres of milk.
- Consult your nutritionist for a specific ration to match your unique farm situation.





St Davids Farm Practice



St David's Farm Practice and Three Counties Feeds

St David's Farm Practice Ltd. has been associated with Three Counties Feed Ltd. for some years as a retained Consultant. We have helped with on Farm Investigations, telephone advice to support staff and with metabolic profile interpretation.

Over the last eighteen months the St David's Farm Practice business has expanded and developed its range of services. We now provide both a full front line emergency service and a proactive preventive medicine. We have employed experienced farm veterinary surgeons to enable us to provide these

services. These vets are based around Devon to provide full cover to our large practice area. An important part of this preventative medicine approach is the association with Three Counties Feeds.

Three Counties Feeds has always taken a proactive approach with its own clients. The Feed Industry has segmented into price dependent sales and feed plus advisory help. The more forward thinking farms are requesting the second approach as they perceive this added value as important to their business. Three Counties Feeds have always taken this second approach. In Holland and in the US the farmer, feed advisor and veterinary surgeon have moved forward to produce the "triangle" giving specific advice to the customer as "one voice." This is the approach that both our companies are now taking.

The Dairy sector requires a preventative health approach to compete in a price sensitive market. The pig and poultry sectors have already achieved this. In these sectors disease control is seen, and measured, as an essential part of the production cycle. The dairy industry has been behind in this respect. Part of the issue is the inability of the different farm advisors to work together. By working together, and looking at all the different aspects of dairy production, we are able to help improve farm performance.

This monthly newsletter is one part of the association. We will provide good, topical information on both veterinary and feed issues.

