NEWSLETTER

Forage Shortages and Fertility

With the long wet winter having depleted on-farm forage stocks and the extended dry spell reducing grass growth significantly, some farms have reported cuts of silage to be down by around 30% or more.

It is vital to understand the knock on effects that the shortage could bring about. If the grazing period for cattle is extended this will mean reduced availability of grazing for any sheep.

Although leaving the cattle out longer will mean a definite saving in bedding, it is also critical that body condition is not jeopardized as this will put further pressure on already depleted forage stocks. The impact of the shortage will be felt not only in the short term but will also have longer lasting consequences with farms potentially having insufficient stocks for the winter months. As such, maintaining a profitable and efficient herd or flock will be more important than ever and carrying 'passenger' animals will significantly affect profitability.

Assessing fertility status and making economically sound decisions with the information can be one way to reduce the impact of forage shortages.

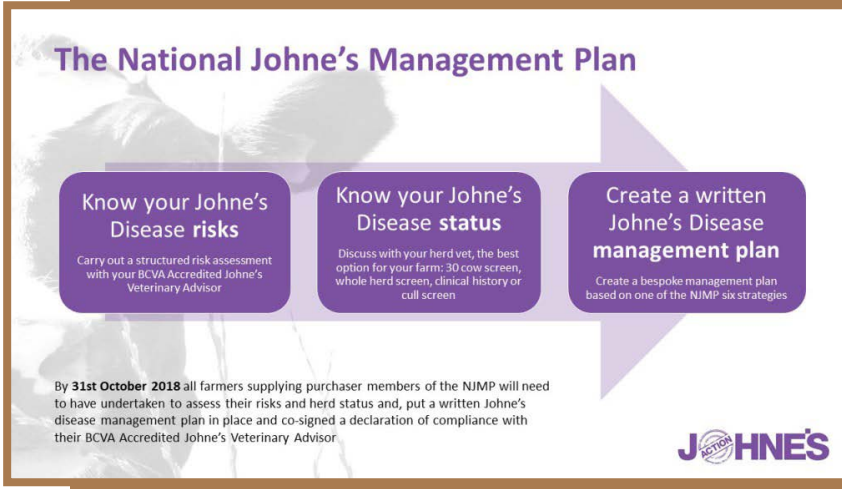
We will be holding a meeting discussing how best to cope in these challenging conditions. Details to be confirmed.

Daleside
Veterinary Group

OCTOBER 2018

Action Johnes

A reminder to all clients that the deadline for assessment, planning and declarations for farms supplying purchasers who are members of the National Johnes Management Plan is the 31st of October



Disease Alert: Grass Staggers

We have seen the flushes of autumn grass peeking through out on pastures now and with it we have seen a couple of cases of subclinical or mild grass staggers.

For those farmers mature enough to remember it, there is a key note of warning we can take from the similar hot dry summer of 1976 when staggers was also an issue that year. Cows up to now have presented with slightly stiffened gaits or minor neurological signs. More dramatic cases present with cattle lying in a 'paddling' convulsion or with hyperexcitable behaviour and ultimately can result in death.

Grass staggers (also known as Hypomagnesaemia) is caused by a lack of magnesium in the diet. It is often associated with lush grass which has a rapid passage rate, which results in reduced nutrient absorption. It can occur in stormy weather, some of which we have experienced recently, when cows are stressed. The problem can also be associated with high levels of potassium (e.g. when applied as a fertiliser to grazing land) which can disrupt magnesium absorption. A similar effect can be seen from ammonium fertiliser.
Cattle are not able to store magnesium in their body so need to consume their requirement each day. There are numerous options to supplement magnesium:

1. **Magnesium boluses**
2. **High magnesium licks**
3. **Magnesium salts can be added to drinking troughs**
4. **Extra forage at grass such as hay, straw or silage**
5. **Cal-Mag molasses solution in buckets in field**
6. **Feed high magnesium nuts**
7. **Dust pasture with Cal-Mag at periods of high risk**

Treating acute staggers is a true emergency so keeping a couple of bottles of injectable Magnesium handy on farm in case prompt treatment is required is recommended.

Beef Fertility

As we all know, the key to profitability for all beef breeding enterprises is high reproductive efficiency. This means achieving:

- **95% calves weaned to cows served**
- **an average calving interval of 12 months**
- **a calving spread of 10 weeks or less.**

Pregnancy diagnosis is one method of monitoring reproductive efficiency and detecting any problems early in the breeding cycle, so that these objectives can be achieved.

Early detection of non-pregnant cows is the main benefit from pregnancy testing, but there are others. In many cases, the age of the calf and the likely calving date can be estimated during rectal palpation. Cows expected to calve early can then be separated from cows expected to calve late. This can provide useful information on which cows to cull if it is necessary to reduce herd size, especially in current times of feed shortage. The calving spread can also be quickly reduced if late-calving cows are replaced with heifers that conceived early.

Various abnormalities responsible for infertility in cows can also be identified. The more common of these include cystic ovaries and uterine infection. The occasional freemartin heifer and other abnormalities of the reproductive organs may also be detected during rectal palpation. Diseases and management problems affecting the whole herd can also be identified much earlier if cattle are pregnancy tested. Low pregnancy rates in one particular group, for example, might indicate problems with an individual bull. Pregnancy testing can also identify herd fertility problems, enabling earlier investigation and action than would otherwise be possible

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