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Parasite Control for Youngstock

The warm wet weather last year provided perfect conditions for many parasites including gut worms and lungworms and as a result we have seen dramatic increases in clinical disease caused by endoparasites:

Gut Worms (parasitic gastroenteritis)

There are many species of gutworm that infect the stomachs and intestines of young cattle. In high numbers they cause ill-thrift, diarrhoea, weight loss and eventually death if left untreated.

Young cattle that are gradually exposed to low levels of gut worms during their first grazing season will develop a strong immunity without the need for worming: *this is often the case with spring-born suckler calves which slowly pick-up 'manageable' numbers of worms as they gradually wean themselves onto grazing.*

Dairy youngstock are often older and weaned by the time they are turned out, so are suddenly exposed to high levels of gut worms following turnout. Strategic worming is therefore required to control the level of gut worm challenge while the animal's natural immunity develops.

Following a sensibly-managed first grazing season most youngstock will be immune against gut worms and won't require worming for subsequent grazing seasons; because continued exposure each season will keep their immunity sufficiently topped-up. The exception to this rule are animals that were turned-out late for their first grazing season and didn't have time for full immunity to develop. These animals therefore require some degree of worming during the first part of their second grazing season.

Control/Treatment Options:

- Ideally turn first-grazing youngstock out onto clean or lightly contaminated pastures; then regularly monitor their **faecal worm egg counts*** to see **if** and **when** they need worming during the grazing season.
- If a faecal egg count indicates that worming is required then treat the group with a short-acting wormer (a yellow, white or short-acting clear drench) before moving them to another lightly-contaminated pasture.

- If moving animals onto a truly 'clean' pasture then leave 10-20% of the strongest animals untreated in order to preserve a susceptible population of worms – this strategy will significantly delay the development of resistance to the worming product you are using.
- If only contaminated pastures are available then more rigorous worm control will be required (the expensive option!). In this situation four options exist:
 1. Give a pulse-release worming bolus at turnout (*e.g. Autoworm first-grazing bolus*) – this will release doses of short-acting wormer at regular intervals providing worm cover for 21 weeks. A big advantage of a pulse-release bolus is that the animal is exposed to safe numbers of worms between each release of wormer, allowing immunity to develop ready for when the bolus runs out.
 2. Give a sustained-release worming bolus at turnout (*e.g. Panacur bolus*) – these are often cheaper than pulse-release boluses but because they continually release wormer they don't allow for immunity to develop as well. Also the concentration of wormer towards the end of the bolus falls below the level needed to effectively kill the worms, which accelerates the development of resistant worms.
 3. Worm regularly with short-acting wormers (preferably using faecal egg counts to determine if and when this is necessary). This may be the cheapest option but requires regular handling.
 4. Worm less-regularly with a long-acting wormer *e.g. Cydectin* (again preferably using faecal egg counts to determine when this is necessary). This option will cost more in wormer but requires less frequent handling.
- Second grazing youngstock which did not have a full first grazing season can either be wormed with short-acting wormers (if faecal egg counts deem it necessary), or can be given an '*Autoworm Finisher Bolus*' at turnout. This bolus is cheaper than the first grazer bolus because it only provides 15 weeks of cover.

Please call us at the practice for advice on developing a worming program for your youngstock, or discuss this with your routine vet.

***Faecal worm egg count testing** - Bring a handful of fresh faeces collected in a glove into the practice. The sample should contain an equal mix of faeces from approximately 10 animals in the group. We will then test the worm egg count for £8.70 exc. VAT. Alternatively you can post the sample to us but please ring for advice on how to package the sample; otherwise the postman may have a nasty surprise!!!
Always label any samples with your farm name and the group of animals it is from.

Lungworm (Husk)

Cattle pick up lungworm from summer and autumn grazing, and after an incubation period develop a 'husky' cough. Because of the incubation period coughing may not develop until after winter housing, even though the cattle are no longer picking up new lungworm larvae.

Young animals are at most risk during their first grazing season. In recent years we have seen husk develop as early as July!

Any coughing cattle should be promptly investigated – lungworm is diagnosed by looking for larvae in faecal samples, or alternatively blood can be tested for lungworm antibodies.

Interesting Fact.....

Once passed in the faeces lungworm larvae climb up mould spores growing on the dungpat; they then become airborne when the mould spores explode! Depending on the wind they can travel large distances and infect previously clean pastures – so always consider lungworm infection in coughing animals even if it has not been a problem before.

Treatment

Once lungworm is confirmed the whole group should be promptly wormed:

- **Yellow drenches** are best for treating lungworm as they cause the worms to be actively coughed up and expelled from the lungs ("Levacide" is a commonly used yellow drench and is available in either oral, injectable or pour-on preparations).
- Clear drenches (Ivermectin etc) are the next best choice.
- White drenches ('Panacur' etc) should not be used to treat husk because the killed lungworms remain in the lungs, causing lung reaction to the dead worms.

Prevention

Vaccination with 'Huskvac' can be considered when turning first grazing youngstock onto pastures known to be infected with lungworm. Two oral doses are required 4 weeks apart, with the second dose ideally given 2 weeks before turnout.

Success of the vaccine relies on subsequent exposure to lungworm following turnout, so that the immunity triggered by the vaccine is continually boosted by lungworm exposure. The vaccine will not work if animals are turned onto a truly 'clean' pasture or given a sustained-release worming bolus or long-acting wormer like Cydectin. Pulse-release boluses and short-acting wormers can be given to animals vaccinated with Huskvac, as sufficient lungworm exposure occurs between each release/dose of wormer.

Please call us at the practice for if you are considering using Huskvac so we can tailor a control strategy for your farm.

Liver Fluke

This is a completely separate parasite which is not killed by conventional wormers.

Many upland areas are still free from this parasite but it is becoming an increasing problem in many wetter lowland areas because the parasite requires mud snails to complete its lifecycle.

Recent wet and mild trends in the climate have favoured an increase in mud snails and therefore liver fluke infection – so remain vigilant for signs of liver fluke even if it has not been a problem in the past.

Liver fluke causes acute disease in the autumn (colic/jaundice/anaemia/sudden death) and chronic disease in the winter (weight loss/diarrhoea/bottlejaw).

Unlike the situation with worms, cattle do not develop a strong immunity against liver fluke and are therefore always susceptible to liver fluke even as adults.

Herds with a known liver fluke problem require strategic grazing strategies around autumn/winter time to reduce the risk of fluke infection: If possible avoid grazing high-risk fields during autumn time and fence off boggy areas in fields.

Herds with a known fluke problem require strategic treatments with specific flukicides during the autumn/winter:

Triclabendazole ('Fasinex') is the only flukicide able to kill **immature fluke**. Its use must therefore be strictly reserved for treating known/diagnosed fluke infections in the Autumn-time (when immature fluke are predominantly responsible for disease). More chronic fluke infections during Winter-time (when adult fluke are predominantly responsible for disease) should be treated with other adult-specific flukicides (e.g. nitroxylnil; 'Trodax').

Unfortunately many **combined** worm and fluke treatments are available; however it is rare that both worms and fluke require treatment at the same time of year. Therefore endeavour to use targeted worm or fluke products and only use a combined product if tests/veterinary advice deems it necessary.

If you suspect signs of liver fluke contact your vet to discuss diagnosis and correct treatment options.