



Cattle vet Ed Hewitt from the Ayrshire-based Armour Vet Centre, which is part of the XLVet Group, takes a timely look at health and welfare issues that impact on dairy herds across the UK. In this issue he tells us how to prevent prolapsed uteruses both at and immediately post calving.

Dry-cow nutrition is key to good muscle function and future fertility

Prolapsed uterus

While not common in UK dairy herds, most dairy producers will have had a cow that suffered a prolapsed uterus, either at or immediately post calving. And it's important that they know the causes, how to help prevent it and how to deal with any cases that do arise.

Sub-clinical or clinical hypocalcaemia (milk fever) is the cause of a prolapsed uterus and this is usually the result of a poor dry cow ration – one that fails to promote calcium generation within the cow's body. The condition is most commonly seen in cows that have been out at grass prior to calving. Grass is naturally high in calcium and it is difficult to provide a low calcium diet while cattle are grazing. And for this reason, it's vital to make sure that close attention is paid to dry-cow nutrition and management, particularly in the 'close up' period – three weeks prior to calving.

Prolapsed uteruses occur either at calving – the uterus comes out with the calf – or immediately after calving. A difficult or prolonged calving, possibly caused by a large calf, that requires the cow to push excessively can also compound the problem. Speedy treatment is key to saving the uterus and the cow. The vet must be called straight away – the sooner the uterus is cleaned and replaced the greater the likelihood of success.

A damaged or dried up uterus could be problematic. And very occasionally a cow can suffer a fatal haemorrhage when the uterus is pushed back inside. I always warn the producer, who is often assisting me, that this could be the case.



The encyclopaedia **Prolapsed uterus**

Causes

Poor dry-cow nutrition that results in sub-clinical or clinical hypocalcaemia (milk fever). This affects muscle function and can result in the cow pushing the uterus out with the calf at calving or immediately post calving. A difficult calving, possibly caused by an excessively large calf, will compound the problem.

Symptoms

The uterus becomes inverted and is expelled out through the cow's vagina.

Prevention and treatment

Sound dry-cow management

and nutrition are vital to prevent sub-clinical or clinical hypocalcaemia and ensure good muscle function – the uterus is a muscle – at calving.

And calve cows close by or inside to aid management and to ensure that any problems are picked up as soon as possible.

Speedy treatment is vital. The vet will lie the cow down with her legs stretched out behind her (help from one or two other people is required) and administer an epidural to ease the cow's discomfort and to make the procedure slightly easier.

The uterus is thoroughly cleaned before being manually pushed back inside the cow. The vet may insert some sutures in the vulva to hold the uterus in place. Post op, the cow is given a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), antibiotics and calcium. A second follow-up shot of calcium must also be administered later that day.

