



Cattle vet Ed Hewitt from the Ayrshire-based Armour Vet Centre, which is part of the XL Vet Group, takes a timely look at health and welfare issues that impact on dairy herds across the UK. In this issue he warns producers to be on the look out for a serious skin disease.

Psoroptic mange is relatively new but producers should be vigilant

# Cattle-scab alert

It's a relatively unknown disease, but producers should be looking for any signs of psoroptic mange as the year progresses – particularly if they don't run a closed herd. The skin disease, which some vets are referring to as cattle scab, is relatively new to Britain. It's come from Europe and it's spreading. The first outbreak was recorded in Wales in 2007 and a further 22 cases have been reported both there and in the south west of England – many of them during the past 12 months. The condition has not been diagnosed in Scottish herds, but producers north of the border should still keep watch for it.

Psoroptic mange is caused by mites that pierce the skin to feed and cause immense irritation. They can survive for up to 12 days without a host. With the disease now established in Wales and south west England, the Scottish Agricultural College is offering free analysis of suspected cases while Moredun Research Institute researchers are developing a blood test to uncover sub-clinical infection. Cattle may be infected without visible signs so a diagnostic blood test would be a valuable management tool. The intense irritation caused by the feeding mites means cattle rub against anything that offers relief and this results in crusting scabs or bleeding along their back, shoulders and tail head. This has implications for animal health, welfare and productivity. It will certainly impact on milk production and fertility. And, if left untreated, it could lead to septicaemia and death.

Treatment of 'scab' in cattle is problematic. Experience in Wales suggests the mites are resistant to commonly used products and none are licensed for use in milking dairy cows. So producers should report any suspect cases to their vet who can then take samples to see if the mites are present and check the efficacy of treatment.



## The encyclopaedia **Psoroptic mange**

### Cause

A mite infestation, similar to the sheep scab mite and difficult to differentiate – even under the microscope. It can be spread from animal to animal and also picked up in cattle trailers and at auction marts.

The mite can survive for up to 12 days without a host.

### Symptoms

Cattle are irritated and can be seen rubbed against wall, trees and any other surface that scratches their itch. Lesions are severe and appear quickly.

They can cover large areas of the body, including their back, shoulders and tail head.

### Treatment

There is resistance to some products and off-license use of other products may be needed to tackle cattle scab. Flypor, for example, has had some success in treating infected cattle. But the advice is to contact your vet, who can confirm the disease and determine an effective treatment. There can be difficulties with using some products on dairy cattle due to the milk withdrawal period required.

### Prevention

Not a problem for closed herds. Take care when buying-in stock – isolate animals for four weeks to make sure they're not carrying the disease.

