



Cattle vet Debby Brown, from Lancaster-based Advance Nutrition, takes a timely look at health and welfare issues that are affecting dairy herds across the UK. Here she offers the low down on coccidiosis – a disease that's becoming increasingly common in calves on UK units.

Stay vigilant and make the most of strong calf prices

Cocci's on the increase

There has been an increasing incidence rate of coccidiosis reported by the AHVLA during the past 10 years, much of which can be associated with a greater degree of intensification in modern livestock production. Nearly all calves will be exposed to the disease at some time, but in healthy animals it does not always cause clinical signs. If there is concurrent disease, or excessively high environmental stress, then reduced animal performance occur.

The disease can cost anywhere between £25 and £60 per calf affected, but could be higher, if you take into account the strong current market values for calves. So it's well worth taking steps to protect your investment.

The main species, which cause coccidiosis outbreaks, are *Eimeria bovis* or *Eimeria zuernii*. The coccidia have a complicated life cycle, which leads to highly resistant oocysts being passed in the faeces of cattle. Under suitably warm and humid conditions, these oocysts develop to the 'infective' stage. The severity of the disease is directly related to the number of infective oocysts digested by the calf. Both acute and chronic forms of the disease may be seen, but the chronic form is the most common. Clinical signs are most often seen in calves aged between three weeks and six months of age.



The encyclopaedia **Coccidiosis**

Cause

Protozoan parasite – coccidian. *Eimeria bovis* and *Eimeria zuernii* are the most pathogenic species.

Symptoms

Acute disease will manifest as diarrhoea, often blood tinged, dehydration, anaemia, secondary bacterial infection and straining (prolapsed rectum).

Chronic disease shows as ill thrift, pasty scour, loss of appetite/reduced feed intakes, poor performance and a protracted period of recovery.

Diagnosis

Presence of clinical findings typical of the disease in a group of calves. Large numbers of oocysts in faecal samples from affected animals.

Treatment

Traditionally, sulphonamides were the drug of choice for treating infection. Now more targeted anticoccidial therapy is used.

Your vet may recommend:

Diclazuril, 1mg/kg, given prior to risk period; Toltrazuril, 15mg/kg, given at start of perceived risk period; and Decoquinat, 1mg/kg, in feed medication during risk period.

Prevention/control

Improvement in management and husbandry is essential to ensure clinical disease does not occur. Isolate and treat infected animals and ensure that bedding is clean and dry. Raise feed and water troughs to prevent faecal contamination and fence off natural water sources and ensure adequate drainage to prevent areas of standing water.

Regularly move troughs and feeders to prevent poaching when at grass and reduce stocking density. Use an 'all-in all-out' system and thoroughly clean and disinfect.

