



Vet Steve Borsberry, from 608 XL Farm Vets, in Warwick, shares some tips on disease prevention and tackling health problems in dairy herds, drawing from his many years of on-farm experience. Here he takes a closer look at a problem that's exacerbated by high rainfall.

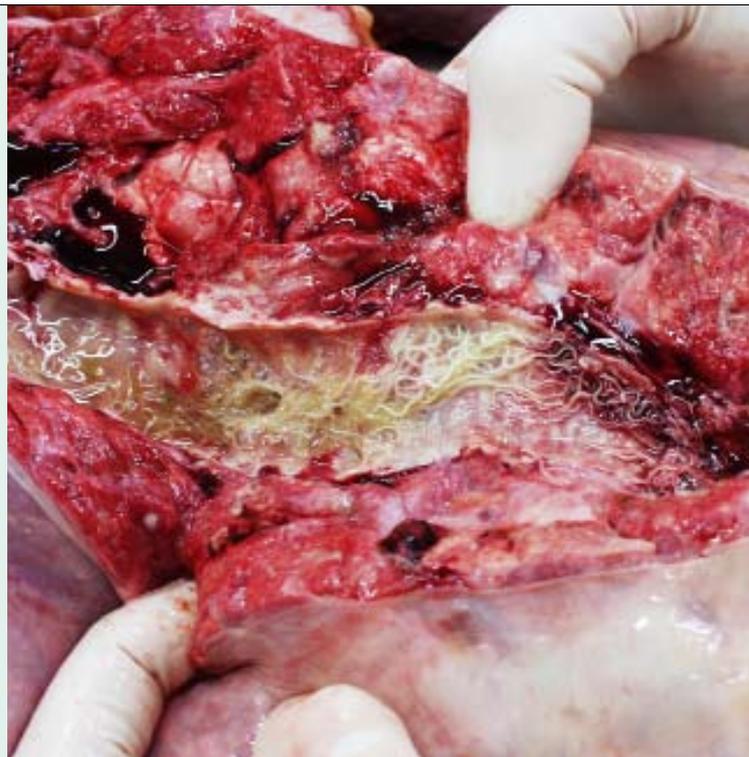
Late-summer cough? It could be lungworm

Wet-weather scourge

This summer – if you could call it that with the highest rainfall on record in some parts of the UK – has proved ideal for lungworm. It used to be considered a disease of first-season grazing cattle, but vets are seeing increasing numbers of outbreaks in adults.

July to September is when it usually manifests itself. In the most severe cases it can be fatal. Cattle can die as a result of an acute allergic reaction to the parasite living in their lungs. Other symptoms include coughing and producers report cows and heifers that are losing condition and performing poorly – in terms of both production and fertility. And at this point it's almost too late. Much of the damage to the animal's lungs – and the producer's pocket – has been done. As with so many diseases and conditions, prevention is the best option.

Signs can vary from a slight cough to acute respiratory problems or even sudden death. Daily liveweight gains in youngstock can be severely affected and, in milkers, yields can be reduced by as much as 8kg of milk per day. Calving index can also increase by up to 30 days and more services per pregnancy are required. One producer estimated an outbreak in his dry cows cost him £20,000 – seven died and the rest had reduced milk yield in the following lactation.



The encyclopaedia **Lungworm**

Causes

Parasite – the lungworm. The adults are white thread-like worms that live in the air passages leading to the lungs. Hundreds of worms may be present in heavily infected animals.

Adult female worms can produce many thousands of eggs which contain a first stage larva. The eggs are coughed up with mucus and swallowed. The larva emerges from the egg in the gastrointestinal tract and leaves the body in the faeces where development to the infective third stage larva takes place.

Symptoms

Coughing, body condition loss and poor performance. Fatal in severe cases. Outbreaks are typically between July and October.

Diagnosis

Relatively easy to diagnose due to coughing. Can also blood sample to see if cattle have been exposed.

Treatment

Any signs of coughing in cows needs urgent treatment with a suitable worming product to kill the parasite. Speed is the key as after treatment coughing may worsen for between 24 and 48 hours. Administering anti-inflammatories can help to ease coughing and lung inflammation while the treatment takes effect.

Prevention

There is a vaccine (Bovilis Huskvac) and approximately 140,000 cattle are vaccinated each year. It's an oral vaccine given between six and two weeks prior to first season turnout and some cattle are given a booster with one dose prior to the subsequent grazing season. Strategic worming is an option, but this cannot be relied upon to ensure that animals develop immunity.

