



Vet Claire Walker, from The Livestock Partnership in West Sussex, offers some advice on how to prevent calf hernias and explains why producers may sometimes see clusters of cases.

Naval dipping and colostrum feeding are key to preventing infection

Tummy trouble

Calf hernias can have serious health implications – particularly if it's caused by infection and not genetics. Some units see very few, if any, cases. Other may see a run of cases from time to time. The majority of cases that I've seen are 'genetic' – a unit may see a handful of calves, usually by the same sire, develop a hernia. Heritability is low, but there is a genetic component in many cases and there are bulls and cows out there that produce calves that are more prone to developing a naval hernia. So if you're seeing the problem in your herd, look at the calves' sires and see if there's a pattern.

The second cause is poor naval hygiene and can be prevented with thorough naval dipping with iodine and feeding enough good quality colostrum after birth to give the calf some immunity against infection.

Good practice at calving means dipping the naval in an iodine-based product. This must offer complete naval coverage and the dip must have a strong enough concentration of iodine – 7% – to do the job properly.

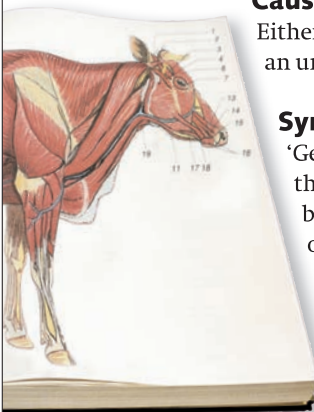
The environment that the cow calves into is also important. Straw bedding needs to be clean and dry, to reduce the calf's chances of picking up infection. Dryness is key as we need the umbilical cord to dry out. If it remains wet, infection is also more likely to set in. In fact infection is the result of the naval not healing over quickly and cleanly. It's vital to check the naval daily to make sure it's drying out and healing. If it's not and it becomes smelly and slimy then veterinary advice should be sought. Antibiotic treatment, via injection, may be required. If infection is not picked up and dealt with, but is left to worsen,



umbilical herniation can be a consequence. And operating on an infected hernia is not easy. The prognosis can be quite poor, and it's possible that the calf may die as a result of the infection. It can track up to the liver or the bladder if the calf doesn't respond to treatment.

Operating on simple, infection-free hernias is much more straightforward and offers a better prognosis. Complications are usually minor where there's no infection involved and these calves go on to fulfil their dairy potential. So the operation, which costs around £150, is money well spent.

The encyclopaedia **Calf hernia**



Cause

Either genetic disposition or the result of an unsuccessfully treated naval infection.

Symptoms

'Genetic' cases are infection free and the calf will have a dry, well healed but 'bulging' naval. Where infection occurs, the naval fails to dry and heal correctly. The naval may also be smelly and slimy. The calf can appear unwell as infection begins to track through the rest of its body.

Treatment

This should be prompt if the hernia is caused by infection. Speed is the key to prevent the infection from tracking to the liver and bladder. Serious infection is harder to treat and can prove fatal.

Hernia operations are 'trouble-free' in 'genetic' cases with excellent prognosis. Operating on infected hernias is difficult and the chances of a full recovery are poor.

Prevention

If a genetic link can be made, bull selection has a role to play here. If hernias are the result of infection, then closer attention to hygiene at calving and post calving management – naval dipping and colostrum feeding – is needed.