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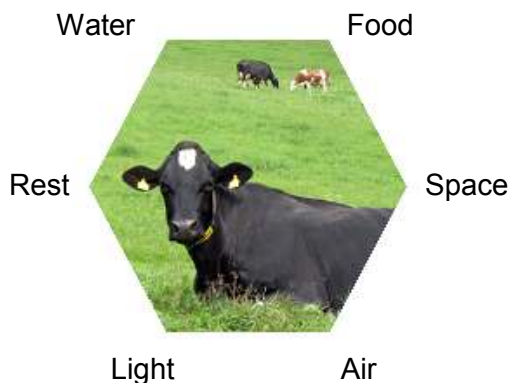
November 2011

Meeting Summary—Cow Signals

What can your cows tell you?

The concept of reading cow behaviour to identify problem areas in their surroundings or routine is growing in popularity, and enabling dairy farmers to more closely meet their cows' needs, leading to increased production and lower costs.

Cows have six key needs as displayed below. By going into the cattle housing and assessing cow behaviour, posture and physical signs with a detached viewpoint, it is easy to identify areas that could be improved, sometimes at little or no cost.



- The Individual Cow: tells you a lot about her environment. Look for signs of lameness, rumen fill, any rubs/lumps from contact with cubicles or feeders, evidence of scour etc.
- Groups of cows: Look at their interactions with each other and their distribution within the shed.
- Food - Do the cows have food in front of them? Are their rumens full? Are there any barriers to eating eg. Bars rubbing on their necks? Is there competition for the trough, or can submissive animals access the food.
- What is the dung consistency like and is it even throughout the group?
- Rest - What percentages of cows are lying correctly in the cubicles? Is there any evidence of hock damage caused by lying on a hard surface? Do they seem able to lie down and get up easily? Cows should ideally

spend 14 hours a day lying down, ruminating, so it is important that they are encouraged to lie down by having a comfortable bed.

- Water - How much drinking space is available? Is it enough for peak times of demand eg. after milking. Are the troughs clean? Are they easily accessible?
- Space - Do the cows have enough space to walk around, are there any dead ends? Is there space to pass a cow drinking at the trough?
- Air - How fresh is the air in the sheds? How fresh is it at cubicle level? Is there good airflow, with sufficient inlets and outlets in the roof?
- Light - Cows need 16-18 hours of a minimum of 200 lux, this is enough to read a small print paper (with your glasses!). They should also have a period of darkness or very dim light. This will help with fertility.

When a farmer spends all day, every day with cows it is easy to stop seeing these signs. This meeting encouraged everybody to take a step back, to look to see if their cows needs are being met in their housing.



Upcoming Meetings

Housing to Prevent Pneumonia (rescheduled)

Healthy Livestock funded for Beef farmers
All welcome.

- **Mon 14 November, 11.30am**
- Woolmers Farm, Bickington
- Lunch provided

Dry cow management - mastitis prevention

(Including use of Orbeseal for those who require certification from their milk buyers)

-Look at dry cow management to prevent mastitis in early lactation.

- **Friday 2 Dec, 1pm**
- Stapleton Farm
c/o Adam and Natalie Stanbury
- Lunch provided

Please ring 01271 879516 to register interest.



Farm Assurance

There are several common areas of non compliance for farm assurance where we may be able to help.

Medicines Records - Please ask us for batch numbers of any medicines used on farm. These are also included on your invoice at the end of the month.

Sharps and Medicines Disposal - Sharps and used medicine bottles should be disposed of in special bins. We can provide you with these and arrange safe disposal.

Lameness and Mastitis Recording - is now compulsory for dairy farms. Please ask us for recording forms if you don't have them already.

Our September sheep farmer meeting at the Muddiford Inn had three speakers



Using Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) to select the right ram for the job by Carol Davis from Signet.

The Terminal Sire Index helps farmers choose rams who will increase growth and lean carcass weight, while minimising any increase in carcass fat. For example, flocks that tend to produce over fat lambs need a ram with a negative fat depth EBV. This means that he will produce leaner lambs when compared to the historical breed benchmark. Rams with a high positive growth EBVs can reduce the time to finish lambs.

An on-farm approach to the sick pregnant ewe by Jenny Schmidt from Charter Vets.

The ewe should be isolated in a warm, dry place with feed and water. The farmer should also

- Take her temperature.
- Check if she's blind.
- Check if she's aborting or lambing.
- Smell her breath and check her nose for discharge.
- Check her BCS.

We then had a quick run through two of the most common causes of a ewe off her legs, namely Twin Lamb Disease (TLD) and Lambing Sickness. These two are easily confused as they produce similar symptoms and may occur simultaneously.

TLD is a deficiency of energy brought about by not enough feed and too many foetuses. Response to treatment is usually poor, so prevention is the best option. Blood sampling ewes 4-6 weeks before lambing will confirm if feeding levels are sufficient. There is a distinctive sweet smell to the breath of ewes with TLD. They frequently appear blind, and may head press.

Lambing sickness is a deficiency of calcium. Calcium is essential for muscle strength, so symptoms include weakness, bloat as the rumen stops working and a green nasal discharge. The treatment required is calcium, either warmed and under the skin, or intravenously depending on how ill the ewe is.

Navigating the Mineral Minefield by Peter Bone, Telsol
The overall take home message was "this is a very complicated subject". He suggested we need to change our thinking about copper deficiency. It has thought for a long time that excessive levels of iron, sulphur and molybdenum can induce signs of copper deficiency. Now, evidence is suggesting that these signs, namely steely wool, loss of wool pigment and poor performance may be due to toxic compounds formed in the rumen from iron, sulphur and molybdenum. The role of copper is to bind them up and prevent absorption into the blood stream. This is why many animals with signs of "copper deficiency" have adequate copper levels when blood tested.

Peter also advocated the use of forage mineral analysis over soil analysis. Mineral interactions and soil pH may affect mineral uptake in forage.

Liver Fluke - Autumn treatment and monitoring

Cattle and sheep that may have picked up fluke during the grazing season should be treated now for adult fluke.

Animals that have been grazed on wet ground will be most at risk (as snails are the intermediate host).

If you are unsure if your cattle are affected by fluke we can blood test a small group or a bulk milk sample to detect antibody. If there has not been exposure there is no need to treat!



Wet pasture is high risk for liver fluke.

But even dry farms can have fluke problems.

Bulk Milk Monitoring

Dairy clients should soon be receiving a sample pot and monitoring form in the post.

We recommend screening for liver fluke antibody to look for evidence of exposure. Several herds have had clinical cases and seen milk drop as a result of fluke infection picked up over the grazing period.

We can also screen for BVD virus. This will pick up circulating virus even in a vaccinated herd. If your herd is affected then you may wish to take further action to eliminate carrier animals.

Please speak to us if you have any questions, or if you do not receive a sample pot and would like one.

Rat Bait

Our small animal vets have seen several cases of dogs that have eaten rat bait. This can cause bleeding disorders and even death in dogs so please seek advice if your dog may have eaten any.