



Theileriosis in beef calves

Written By Dr. Richard Porter

Predominantly Theileriosis has diminished as a significant disease post initial epidemic 7 odd years ago, which spread around the North Island on the back of the indigenous tick population. This blood parasite had a severe impact on cattle health causing significant financial loss on a naïve cattle population.

The majority of cattle are now immune and clinical disease is isolated to the odd compromised adult, and unfortunately to young well-grown beef calves, which is far more concerning. It seems that the cows immunity is frequently not passed on to the calves or the reverse situation, allowing the calf to mount a response which ultimately causes red cell destruction. This results in anaemia and jaundice which often leads to death.

This occurs in a relative small percentage of calves in a mob around 8 weeks of age and unfortunately mostly in the biggest and strongest calves, hence an economic impact. The real problem is this situation will occur each year with no effective prevention.

Interestingly, dairy replacements and hand reared dairy beef can also be exposed to Theileria infected ticks but do not experience any clinical disease to speak of. Affected beef calves are quite hard to identify and are usually beyond recovery once it has become obvious that they are weak and debilitated. The specific Theileria drugs imported over the peak of the outbreak are no longer available and these had quite a few red tape drawbacks. These drugs were only mildly effective in advanced cases. Blood transfusions could be beneficial in these situations, but were restricted to only one transfusion attempt.

Often the first calf will be missed, but careful observation may detect calves in the early stages of disease where high doses of tetracycline antibiotic can have some benefits in saving lines.

Care with weaning

Written By Dr. Rachel Lane

An important job amongst the AB period is weaning of the spring born calves. The calves have been happy on milk with meal supplementation; however are they ready to be off milk and on to grass?

Some points to consider when preparing for weaning:

- **Weighing calves** - this gives the best information when deciding whether a calf is ready to wean. Alternatively weigh bands can help in estimating calf weight. This, as well as average meal consumption, helps make the right decision.
- **Drenching** - calves benefit most from oral drenches, especially combination products such as Arrest C. Ensure the drench gun is set for the right weight and adjust the dose accordingly, and check the drench expiry date.
- **Weaning is stressful** - gradual transition into weaning is important, therefore do not plan all jobs such as drenching, vaccinations, transport etc all in one day
- **Vaccinations** - ensure this lines up with locations and circumstances. This includes ensuring calves have their booster vaccination before leaving the property (ie start the vaccine 1 month before sending). This also needs to suit the minimum age of calves for the vaccine.
- **Trace elements** - these include selenium, copper and B12. This plays an important role in calf growth and reaching target liveweights. Taking blood samples will help identify a base level of trace elements at the time of weaning. A plan can then be made to implement injection or oral products to provide supplementation.

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very Merry Christmas!**