



nantwich
farmvets^{LLP}

NEWSLETTER

M A Y
2021

This Month:

Mobility Scoring

Grass Staggers

Website Launch

Medicines Course



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PARTNERSHIP PROGRESSION



Back in August 2010 when Rob George offered me a job at Nantwich Vets, I accepted the offer and planned to work here for six months or so before heading off somewhere more exotic. Ten years later and I'm still here, on the brink of becoming a partner! Those ten years have flown by but have seen lots of change in both the farming and vet worlds.

We've seen pressure mounting on farmers from all aspects; from the public wanting better welfare standards on dairy and beef units, to milk buyers restricting what drugs can be used, tougher restrictions on carbon footprints and demanding improved levels of lameness and mastitis on farm.

The vet industry has seen massive changes too, with several high profile takeovers from corporate practices in the area, as well as several new practices springing up. This has certainly forced us to keep

up the quality of service we offer as a practice.

But despite these pressures on both sides, our clients have continued to grow and improve productivity and efficiency while still improving welfare standards. Our vet practice has also grown from a 12 vet practice in 2010 to one that will have 19 vets by summer 2021. We're now supported by a team of 6 vet techs and TB testers who all do a fantastic job of vaccinating, disbudding, mobility scoring and TB testing, amongst other tasks, often without you even noticing they're there!

I have no doubt that our place on farm will continue to evolve, moving from "firefighting" and covering emergencies to a more consultancy and advisory role, but rest assured, we'll continue to be just a phone call away, 24 hours a day!

SPOTLIGHT

GRASS STAGGERS

With turnout steadily progressing across the practice and the grass soon to enter a bit of a flush, we're coming across a few cattle suffering from staggers, including one case where a significant amount of the herd has been affected. So without sounding like we're teaching your nan how to suck eggs, we'll cover some of the basics of what it is, what to watch out for, and what to do if you have a case.



Staggers (hypomagnesemia) occurs when the amount of magnesium in the blood stream falls below a certain threshold, and is caused when the amount of magnesium in the forage is low (or feed intake is reduced in a fresh calved or sick animal) and doesn't meet the required amount to maintain a healthy concentration in the blood. The body has no way of storing magnesium, unlike other substances such as calcium, and so needs a regular intake. The amount of magnesium needed is much higher (nearly the amount) in milking cows than youngstock or dry cows, as milk contains a high proportion of magnesium. So it's vital that another source of magnesium is provided for milking cattle during this time when the forage is low in magnesium, ie. with lush spring grass. Some parlour cakes might provide a sufficient source if fed adequately; mineral licks and buckets or mag chloride flakes dissolved in water troughs can be an alternative supplement for high risk periods.

Magnesium is required for normal function of nervous system, so clinical signs of staggers are generally neurological. Acute cases may quickly go from grazing normally, to suddenly throwing up their heads, bellowing, galloping in a blind frenzy, falling, and exhibiting severe paddling convulsions. These animals may also just be found dead. Less acute cases may show more subtle signs, with cows appearing to be not quite right, walking stiffly or wobbly, muscle tremors, and hypersensitivity to touch and sound. These signs may last for a couple of days before she goes down, and starts to convulse. If you can treat these cows before they get to this stage then you can save yourself, and the cow, a lot of stress. It is important not to make too much noise, or stress the cow out by trying to move her at this point, as the extra stress could cause her to go to the acute phase before the magnesium under her skin has a chance to bring her blood levels back up to normal.

Treatment is usually a bottle of magnesium under the skin, and a bottle of 40CM calcium in the vein (you might see us add a *bit* of mag to the calcium bottle). The calcium helps treat any milk fever, and contains a small amount of magnesium. However it is important that the bottle of magnesium is not given in the vein, as this can cause a sudden rise in blood magnesium resulting in potentially fatal cardiac arrhythmias.

MOBILITY SCORING



We have gained a few new members since we last did some mobility score training with the Nantwich Farm Vets team. To ensure that all our scorers are carrying out mobility scoring to the same consistent standard, we aim for all of our scoring team to be accredited on the Register of Mobility Scorers (ROMS). For this reason, we recently organised a ROMS mobility training session with Owen Atkinson for some of our team, kindly supported by CEVA Animal Health.

WHO SCORES?

To start the session the group were all asked to consider what they would personally most like to be scored on and least like to be scored on and by whom. Several of the parents in the room joked about being scored on their parenting style by their children. This raised some interesting discussion about the difficulties in being objective when scoring anything, if you are too actively involved. This is the reason

many farms like to use an independent mobility scorer, so a fresh pair of eyes can help spot the early signs of lameness to ensure cows receive treatment early and make a quick recovery. Most farmers will be able to list from the top of their heads the score 3 cows in the herd; they come in the parlour last, have been noticeably hobbling round for weeks and may have been treated multiple times. But the more important cows to identify (that are less noticed while you're milking or busy doing other jobs) are the score 2s that have recently gone lame, and aren't as chronic or severe as the score 3s, so they can be treated effectively as soon as possible.

WHY SCORE?

It was reiterated for us that this message of *prompt and effective treatment* is the

key reason why mobility scoring is such an essential part of lameness control. Research shows that the sooner a lame cow is treated, the greater her chance of making a full recovery. Anyone who trims feet knows that it is much easier to treat a little sole bruising rather than dealing with a full blown sole ulcer, and it minimises all the negative longer term effects on milk production, fertility and culling.

WHAT TO SCORE?

When it comes to spotting the subtle signs of early lameness, Owen gave us a good reminder that, as prey animals, cows will try and hide weaknesses to avoid standing out from the herd. Nicky and Will were given a bag of sharp stones, and one of them had to put all of the stones in one of their shoes. The rest of the group had to guess who was 'lame' and in which foot. It was surprising how difficult the group found it to spot who it was, with even more debate over which foot. When they were asked to repeat this with a bag of nails it still was not obvious. The point being, when cows show lameness, they are in severe pain and just can't hide it any more!

The scoring system used is the AHDB four stage score (see next page), where 0 and 1 are considered to have good mobility, score 2 would benefit from treatment and score 3 would benefit from treatment and some extra TLC such as reduced walking distances and more lying space (a straw/sand yard rather than cubicles). In some cases score 3 cows should be prioritised for culling if they fail to improve.

There was a range of previous mobility scoring experience in the group so it was helpful to go through exactly what to be looking out for when scoring a herd of cows. The advice to focus on the feet when scoring (it may sound obvious, but it's easy to spend too much time looking at the back or the head) was useful particularly for spotting the subtle changes in rhythm caused by early lameness. After testing our skills on some video clips of cows, our group then headed on farm to get some real life experience. We appreciate the farm team that enabled us to invade during milking time for this.

Following the training our team then had to complete an online assessment to become ROMS accredited mobility scorers. This means we have now doubled our numbers of ROMS accredited scorers in the practice, including all of our Vet Tech team and several of the Vets.

We hope to run a mobility scoring event for farmers later in the summer, to promote our mobility scoring services and to train on-farm teams in spotting the early stages of lameness. We will be keeping a close eye on the government guidance as COVID restrictions begin to ease and will hopefully be able to set a date for this soon. In the meantime, if you would like any more information on mobility scoring, speak to one of our team.



images taken from ahdb.org.uk

AHDB MOBILITY SCORE SHEET

The full AHDB Mobility Score sheet can be found at ahdb.org.uk, where the following information is from.

SCORE 0 – GOOD MOBILITY

Walks with even weight-bearing and rhythm on all four feet, with a flat back
Long, fluid strides possible



SCORE 1 – IMPERFECT MOBILITY

Steps uneven (rhythm or weight-bearing) or strides shortened; *affected limb or limbs not immediately identifiable*



SCORE 2 – IMPAIRED MOBILITY

Uneven weight-bearing on a limb that is immediately identifiable and/or obviously shortened strides (usually with an arch to the centre of the back)



SCORE 3 – SEVERELY IMPAIRED MOBILITY

Unable to walk as fast as a brisk human pace (*cannot keep up with the healthy herd*)
Lame leg easy to identify – limping; may barely stand on lame leg(s); back arched when standing and walking. Very lame



TEAM NEWS

NEW WEBSITE

We have recently launched our new website at www.nantwichfarmvets.co.uk!

New content will be added to the site in the coming months, so do keep an eye out. The website includes full details of the services we offer, training courses that we are running (obviously these will be expanded once Covid allows) and more. If you would like to put a face to the voices you have only heard on the end of the phone, visit the 'Your Team' page. You will find detail on our whole team, including vet techs and office/support staff.

You can also use the website to book onto our events/courses online, which may be helpful if you want to book a place outside of office hours, or to share the link with a member of your farm team so they can register themselves. You will still be able to book onto events in the usual ways such as calling the office or speaking to one of the team directly.



COURSES

ONLINE MEDICINES COURSE

Wednesday 5th May, 10:30am start

These courses include covering correct administration of medicines and avoiding residues and fulfill all the requirements for Red Tractor Farm Assurance, or the first part of a Milksure course. If you are interested or need to attend one of these courses, ring the office to get your name on the list or you can now book online at www.nantwichfarms.co.uk/training



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