



nantwich
farm vets LLP

NEWSLETTER

JULY
2021

This Month:

Automatic Calf Feeders
Cheshire Agricultural Trade Fair
Team News
An Inaugural Wordsearch!



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SUMMER SUNSHINE

Summer is well and truly here, and it's really pleasing to see that so many of you have made the most out of that wet May we had and managed to get so much silage clamped already. No doubt we will be doing a rain dance over the coming weeks if rainfall continues to be so sparse!

Unfortunately, Boris has prolonged our return to normality with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, but given that even the spring chickens of our practice are vaccinated now, normality should hopefully only be a matter of weeks rather than months away. I'm sure you'll all be in agreement that it's quite refreshing to sit in a beer garden in the sunshine after a hard day's graft.

After so many cancelled events over the last year (including this year's Nantwich Show) we are very excited to be attending the Cheshire Agricultural Trade Fair on 28th July. We would like to invite everyone to join us on the day and we are keeping our fingers crossed for good weather. Full details are on the invite on the back page.

On the topic of sunshine, heat stress should be at the forefront of our minds at this time of year, with the



short term effects of decreased milk production and reduced feed intakes leading to longer term negative impacts on fertility.

As touched upon by Peter's 'Prevention in Practice' article in last month's edition, the key to managing heat stress is to prevent the issues arising in the first place. Provisions to reduce stocking density in high throughput areas such as the collecting yard, and enabling more access to water troughs and shade can assist with this, as can improving ventilation in existing buildings.

I will be writing an article on heat stress in next month's newsletter, so keep your eyes peeled, but if anybody has any particular concerns about heat stress, or anything else going on in their herd / flock, then as always, don't hesitate to get in touch with one of your seventeen-strong veterinary team here at NFV.

Craig

Cover photo: courtesy of Aled Williams. Do keep sharing us your farm pictures on our FB page - landscaped with plenty of space around any animals makes it a lot easier to use as a cover photo!

IN FOCUS

MAKING THE MOST OF AUTOMATIC CALF FEEDERS

Automatic calf feeders (ACFs) are a popular option for calf feeding. Gwen Davies discusses several important factors to consider to ensure you are getting the best results.

When it comes to feeding your calves, automatic feeders can tick a lot of boxes. There is the potential for them to be time and labour saving (at least the time spent mixing and feeding), to increase calf feed intakes and growth rates, and improve consistency in milk concentration and hygiene. But this potential will only match reality when you pay attention to certain details. Without this attention, there is also the potential for creation of lots of problems!

MONITORING AND MAINTENANCE

Your automated feeder is one of the key factors to pre-weaning nutrition success and therefore should be carefully monitored and maintained. Without appropriate monitoring of calf feeding behaviour and calibration of your machine, studies have shown a huge variation in total milk solids as well as temperature and total bacterial counts, and therefore milk replacer composition. This variation can lead to nutritional scours and associated calf



performance issues.

Checking that your machine is calibrated and feeding your calves correctly should be part of a weekly routine. Part of a daily routine should include looking at computer records of calf feeding behaviour and intakes to pick up on any individual health issues.

HYGIENE

As with all calf feeding equipment, your feeders should be spotlessly clean. Consider: would you drink out of it yourself (a question any farm

Fig 1: ACFs with individual tag readers enable you to monitor milk intakes and feeding behaviour



should also ask about their feeding buckets!)? A potential pitfall of ACF is having multiple calves drinking from the same teat, allowing infectious disease to spread easily between calves. Although some ACFs have a fully automatic cleaning process that should be carried out 2-3 times each day, steps should be put in place to ensure ongoing monitoring of machine hygiene.

Hygiene top tips:

Swap teats - have two sets of teats and swap them daily (or even every 12 hours), with one set being cleaned and disinfected while the other is on the machine.

Inspect teats for damage - damaged teats can affect milk flow to the calf, and be a potential cause of bacterial build up.

Weekly manual clean - clean out the hopper and the hose connecting the machine to the teat on a weekly basis, and at least thoroughly inspect the cleanliness of all parts of the machine that comes into contact with milk or milk powder



Fig 2: dirty teats will harbour and spread bacteria through groups of calves.

CALF GROUPING

This is a key factor in ensuring successful management with ACF, both in relation to group size and age.

Studies have shown that larger calf groups (more than 18 calves per teat) have an increased risk of developing diseases such as scours and pneumonia, which is thought to be linked to an increased stocking density and competition in larger groups.

In addition to this, it has been demonstrated that due to increased competition at feeders, intakes are reduced and therefore growth rates are significantly reduced in those calves in larger group size. To avoid this, it's recommended that group sizes should be kept to 8-10 calves per feeder.

Group age should also be considered; ideally there should be no more than one week of age range between the youngest and oldest calves within the same group to reduce potential bullying and competitive behaviour from older calves.



Fig 3: a clean feeding machine goes alongside a clean environment in controlling calf diseases

Another important consideration is the age in which calves are introduced to ACF. Practically speaking, older calves are much faster learners and therefore the older the calf the easier it is to train them on the feeder. Additionally, studies have found that calves introduced onto ACF under 12 days of age are 50% more likely to develop pneumonia.

In summary, calf group size should be kept to 8-10 calves per feeder with a minimal age range, and in order to reduce the risk of calves developing pneumonia, calves should not be transitioned onto ACF until they are older than 12 days of age.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

An important consideration is ensuring the teat is at calf height level, in order to allow maximum intakes and reduce the risk of calves aspirating milk when drinking. It is also important to consider the difference in height between the milk outlet and the teat. If the distance between the

outlet is lower than 15 cm than the teat, because of the effects of gravity, calves find it increasingly difficult to drink, leading to increased time spent at feeders and overall reduced feed intakes.

Time saved mixing and feeding calves shouldn't mean you spend less time with your calves. But it should mean the time spent is less about being a milk delivery service, and more about being a calf manager.

IN SUMMARY

Automated calf feeders may not be for everyone but following these tips will help ensure you get the most out of your feeders, optimising calf nutrition during the pre-weaning period. If you have any questions then please feel free to get in touch with me!

REFERENCES

- AMTS webinar 'Feeding calves in robotic systems.' April 11, 2019. <https://agmodelsystems.com/the-nutritionist-2019-saito/>
- Hoards Dairyman webinar 'Feeding calves as groupies'. June 8, 2015. <https://hoards.com/article-16035-feeding-calves-as-groupies.html>

COURSES

ONLINE MEDICINES COURSE

Wednesday 28th July, 10:30am start

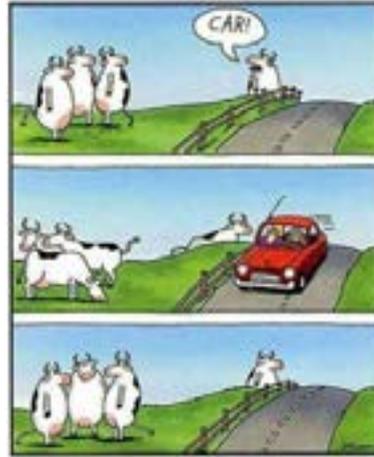
There are still a few places remaining on this month's course. The session covers correct use and administration of medicines and avoiding residues and fulfils all the requirements for Red Tractor Farm Assurance. If you are interested or need to attend one of these courses, ring the office to book your place.



WORDSEARCH

Below are hidden twenty words from this month's newsletter. How many can you find?

B	S	X	M	P	L	F	L	E	N	E	I	G	Y	H
F	R	Y	S	W	I	A	E	G	S	K	T	L	B	E
S	G	E	A	L	B	A	N	E	O	V	I	M	R	A
Y	A	M	T	O	A	B	G	R	D	T	R	S	E	T
N	E	U	U	T	Z	U	P	E	E	E	E	B	S	S
H	N	R	T	M	E	D	N	A	G	N	R	Y	I	T
V	I	R	C	O	I	L	T	O	I	A	I	F	D	R
K	H	T	I	V	M	S	S	C	M	D	H	W	U	E
T	S	U	O	A	R	A	I	W	Q	U	S	I	E	S
H	N	C	D	W	F	D	T	M	E	L	E	P	S	S
B	U	G	T	T	E	E	N	I	L	N	H	N	F	J
I	S	G	A	M	S	L	D	S	C	I	C	E	P	N
O	J	O	I	Y	T	I	R	A	H	C	N	Z	K	A
U	A	L	O	F	P	W	I	O	R	E	E	B	O	R
Z	K	F	C	O	G	V	L	D	R	T	M	E	X	P



TEAM NEWS



This month we are sad to have to say goodbye to Nic from our support staff team as she rides off into the sunset of retirement. Nic has been a stalwart in the practice for over 16 years, mostly dispensing medicines at the front desk and the stock room and sorting out the myriad drug orders that come through the practice each week. Nic, you will be greatly missed and we wish you all the best!

On a fundraising front, we have a team of five golf enthusiasts who are rising up to the Great Golf Challenge, playing 72 holes (four full rounds) on Wed August 25th, to raise money for Cancer Research UK. Craig, Jack, Will, John M and Peter welcome any and all donations towards this great cause. Look out on social media or speak to them for details on how and where you can give.



CHESHIRE AGRICULTURAL TRADE FAIR

BOOK TODAY
CheshireAgTradeFair.co.uk

To comply with Covid restrictions you **MUST** pre-register and print out your ticket – No Ticket, No Entry.

FREE to attend!

When Wednesday 28th July 2021
Where The Cheshire County Show Ground
Time 9.30am – 4.30pm

CheshireAgTradeFair.co.uk

 
@CheshireAgFair

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