

Summer mastitis

Summer mastitis, as its name suggests, is a specific type of mastitis that predominately, though not exclusively, occurs during these warm summer months with cows out at pasture. It can also affect heifers, leading to devastating effects. Colloquially it is also known as '**August bag**'.

The causative bacterial agents involved are a mixed bunch, including *Streptococcus dysgalactae*, *Peptococcus indolicus* and *Arcanobacterium pyogenes*. The route for infection is thought to be linked to summer flying insects, most notably the sheep headfly, *Hydrotaea irritans*.



Constant and high levels of worrying by flies around the udder facilitates bacterial entry directly into the teat canal. However, the situation may well be more complex than this with there being some evidence to suggest that internal systemic spread of bacteria from other parts of the body, such as other external wounds or orifices, may well result in bacterial colonisation of mammary tissue and resultant mastitis.

The affected quarter, or often whole udder, becomes swollen, inflamed and very painful. A yellow, foul smelling discharge usually leaks out of these swollen teats and inevitably attracts more flies – thus increasing the potential for infection transfer to other nearby livestock.

As the disease progresses, irreversible tissue damage occurs and the quarter will undoubtedly be lost. Toxins released by the bacteria cause significant systemic illness.

Treatment is most often via regular and repeated stripping of the affected quarter, to remove as much affected material as possible, followed by intra-mammary antibiotics combined with antibiotic injections as well as anti-inflammatories to counter the systemic effects of bacterial toxins.

Heifers and cows with summer mastitis are best isolated to prevent the spread of infection.

Minimise your risks of Summer Mastitis by:

1. Implementing effective dry cow management strategies, including the use of specific long-term intra-mammary antibiotics where appropriate – under the recommendations for targeted and effective use of dry cow antibiotic therapy. Correct use of teat end sealants for all cows and exceptionally good hygiene when performing the dry off procedure are paramount.



Attention to detail is key.

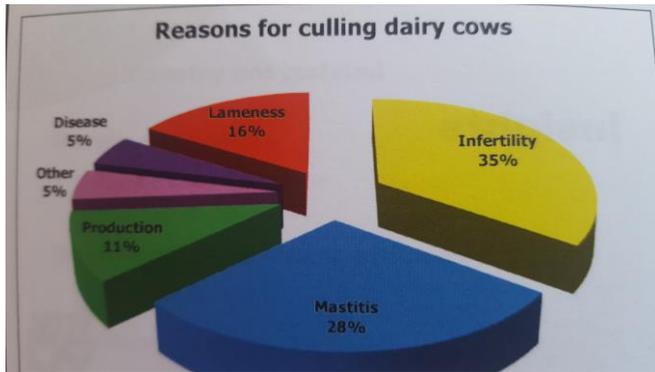
2. Ensuring good teat end condition through high levels of cow comfort, regular maintenance of the milking machine, good parlour routine and ensure efficient teat prep/care protocols in place.



3. Review and implement effective fly control measures for cattle at pasture, including pour on anti-parasitic products, fly repellent tags and avoiding areas of woodland and riverbanks for at risk dry cows and heifers.

Cow Value

Why do cows leave the dairy?



Each year between a quarter (25%) and a third (33%) of milking cows are replaced. Often culling is thought of as a major expense and many seek to lower their cull rate as a pathway to increased profitability. This is not the case – despite what many financial advisors and accountants may believe.

Replacing a cow too late is expensive. Replacing a cow too early is expensive. Replacing a cow at the optimum time is profitable. We need to get out of the mindset of ‘cull costs’ and think more along the lines of ‘**replacement investment**’.

Farms with higher calf mortality and sub optimum heifer rearing management tend to have lower cull rates (as they need to hang on to cows beyond their profitable lifespan) and are often then ‘forced’ into buying replacements (in order to maintain herd numbers when these older cows eventually leave). This costs the farm and is only seen as an expense.

Farms with lower calf mortality and good heifer rearing success tend to have higher cull rates (as cows are replaced at the point at which their income or value to the dairy is outweighed by the value of bringing in a heifer replacement). This inevitably leads to a more sustainable and profitable business and hopefully herd expansion.

The term ‘cull’ is a bit ambiguous and is often seen in a poor light, implying that an animal is leaving the herd for a negative detrimental reason. This may well occur with illness, infertility, mobility issues or of course TB losses. These are ‘**involuntary culls**’ and are often the only sort of cull to leave farm.

However, replacing a cow with an upcoming heifer just at the right time is a ‘**voluntary cull**’ and can be purely based upon the income ratio between those two animals. The factors affecting these income ratios are global to the herd, rather than specific to individual cows and include feed costs, milk price and interest rates. It is not an attempt to put monetary value on individuals, but more an informed comparison of the economic impact of keeping or replacing certain cows with a herd average 1st lactation heifer.

When numbers of replacements reared is higher than involuntary cull exits, then **Income Over Feed Costs (IOFC)** can be used to determine which cows can be removed and replaced in order to increase



profitability from milk. **IOFC** can be calculated using yield, milk price, and maintenance/production costs and then offset these against cost of replacement rearing and cull value of exiting animal. It may well be that the dairy farms of the future will need to become more economically efficient on a herd level when making individual cow decisions.



Best wishes, Ian.

Hereford Bulls For Sale

Service age Pedigree, Polled Hereford Bulls,
for more information contact
Alan Timbrell on 07889044070

Phone Changes: We wanted to let everyone know that we are introducing a phone options system at the practice. To help deal with your enquiries promptly and efficiently when you phone the usual number (01666 823035), you will be given two options: dial “1” to arrange visits and all veterinary enquiries or dial “2” to order medicines from the pharmacy.