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Back to the Basics

Ok beef farmers, don't ignore this newsletter. I know that Heartland's newsletters often focus on Dairy topics but there will be a few tidbits in this one that may help you out as well so read on and hopefully you will find some points in here that you can use.

We are all pretty busy and don't begrudge our producers looking after their own "emergency" work themselves. I would just ask that if you are going to do it that you do it in a timely fashion, start treatment early to maximize the chance of success for you and your patient.

No matter what you are looking at it will start with a general physical exam. It is vet school basics; it is what we try to drive home with our vet students and hopefully try to help train our producers as well. My uncle, Doc Lloyd, would always say "You are more likely to misdiagnose a problem because you didn't look rather than you didn't know". Be as complete with your examination as you can. Here are a few common presenting complaints:

Presenting complaint off feed or down in milk?

Take their temperature. Is there a fever? 39.5 or 103.1 is generally our cut point. Any temperature above that should have you start looking for the source. Here are a few common places to consider:

- 1) Lungs: is it pneumonia? Is it breathing fast or labored? Coughing? Snotty nose?
- 2) Udder: Mastitis? Swollen ¼? Abnormal milk? Hungry calf for you beef farmers?
- 3) Uterus: Retained placenta? Metritis? Dead calf?
- 4) Infected wound or swelling somewhere?

Assess energy balance. Are they relatively close to calving? Could they be ketotic? Test milk or blood for bhb. Blood BHB > 1.2 or milk > 200 start treating with a glycol product and check for a ping. No DA? Pump with oral fluids and Bubba mix?

Assess dehydration. Look for sunken eyes, prolonged skin tents (pinch the skin on upper eyelid or neck, should return to "flat" in less than 2 seconds). If dehydrated look for a source such as scours, lack of access to a working water bowl (it happens). Administer oral fluids if dehydrated. We can't tell an animal is dehydrated until they are at least 5-8% dehydrated already, that means for every 100lbs they will be short 2.5 to 3.5 litres of fluids before we even recognize it. It wouldn't hurt to give some extra fluids at least once even if they don't look dehydrated.

Assess locomotion and pain. Any signs of lameness or injury interfering with willingness to get up and eat? Generalized pain somewhere? Consider Anti-inflammatories such as Anafen, Metacam, or Banamine to make them comfortable and get them eating more and quicker.

Assess manure consistency. Goldy locks and the three bears apply here..... too loose, too stiff or just right. Too loose? Grain overload? Indigestion? Scours with a fever? It could be infectious either viral or bacterial. Should they go on antibiotics, anti-inflammatory or do you need to feed a bit of extra hay to settle their guts? Might need a bit of advice from us to come up with a plan.

Too firm or stiff? They could be dehydrated, ketotic, constipated(unlikely). Referring to the other parts of your general physical exam above will help sort that out.

Presenting complaint calving?

The old guys would say you don't have to be real smart to calve out cows.....just have to be able to count to three.... two legs and a head or two legs and a tail. If you don't count all three don't start pulling until you can count to three. Hurray up and wait! The old guys also used to say that the best thing for a calving was a big cigar, if you have a cow calving go smoke that big cigar and when you are done go see if she still needs help. Cows should show progression within 1 hour of starting the process. First calvers may need 2 hours. Don't be afraid to reach in. The more cows you reach into the more comfortable you will become diagnosing and correcting issues. Just please be clean, wash them well and use a shoulder length glove to examine them. I'm sure all of us can share stories of coming to a calving only to hear "I thought she would have calved yesterday but she still hasn't done anything yet". Those cases tend not to turn out so well. If we are on farm helping with a calving don't be afraid to ask us to teach you what we are feeling or what we are doing. We are happy to teach you what we know.

Presenting complaint can't stand?

Same assessment as off feed above but focus on temperature, mastitis, injury, dehydration, or lameness. If it is a mature cow that has calved recently low calcium should top the list.... even for you beef farmers. Don't forget to check for mastitis that one will come back to bite you if you miss it, trust me, I've been there. For young calves check for scours and dehydration, swollen joints or navels but don't forget Vitamin E and selenium.

Presenting complaint calf scours?

Same assessment as off feed above but focusing on temperature and dehydration. Oral fluid therapy is the key to treatment and cleanliness is the key to prevention. It is dehydration and hypothermia that kills the calf in 95% of cases. Bacterial infections are a rare cause of death. Remember the comment above about our poor ability to identify mild dehydration. An extra feeding of warm water with a balanced electrolyte solution will be beneficial to any scouring calf even if you think they might not need it. Cleanliness is king! In most cases when we work up we find some place in that calf's life where they were exposed to too many "bugs". A heavily used and wet or dirty calving area, dirty calf pens or hutches, or dirty pails/bottles/nipples/bucket milkers are all risk points for the spread of the scour bugs. Be honest with yourself about how clean or dirty those areas/utensils are. We do have vaccines or drugs we can give if we can't beat your system but why spend time implementing those programs if a bit of extra straw or cleanliness will solve your issues?

All of these suggestions are merely starting points for you. We would be happy to work with you to come up with farm specific or case specific protocols for you. They can be simple "decision trees" that will lead you to appropriate plans for each case. That will get you well on your way to be able to provide timely "first aid" to your cattle to help produce more positive outcomes. Just ask us and we will help as best we can.

Rod Weiringa

New Vet Starting May 16!

Laura Michalovic will be starting with us very soon. Laura was one of our externship students last summer and we are very excited to have her joining us as a Large animal veterinarian. Please join us in welcoming Laura to Heartland and our community when you get a chance.

Fly Control

Have you heard the buzz? Large animal technicians are now offering fly prevention in combination with dehorning services. Ask your large animal tech for more information!



Upcoming stat holidays

The clinic will be closed Victoria day weekend, May 21-23. As always, veterinarians will be available 24-7 for emergency service. The Saturday fee schedule will remain unchanged from non-stat weekends.