



NOT ALL MILK FEVER CASES ARE VISIBLE...

By Dr. William J. Prokop, DVM
Senior Manager Technical Services - Dairy

Every dairy farmer knows how much time and care it takes for a cow with clinical milk fever to recover, which is why we do our utmost to avoid these. However, herds with low clinical milk fever should not be complacent; sub-clinical milk fever cases could be silently robbing herd performance.

A study in Germany estimated clinical milk fever cases at 7.2% but sub-clinical cases were over 5 times higher at 40.7%¹. The same study reported that less than half of farms had a milk fever prevention strategy in place. Taking into account the costs associated with the disease, the cost of implementing a milk fever prevention strategy can easily be justified.

Although costs for a clinical case of milk fever will be much higher, the higher incidence rate of sub-clinical milk fever makes its overall financial burden substantially greater.

Current day thinking suggests that increased inflammation around calving disrupts calcium balance and predisposes cows to sub-clinical milk fever, as well as other health issues such as retained placenta, metritis, displaced abomasum, ketosis and mastitis. All of these conditions lead to poorer milk yields, fertility and consequently premature herd culling. With these effects in mind, it's easy to see how costs for sub-clinical milk fever can add up.

But the good news is that it can be relevantly simple to implement a milk fever prevention strategy on your farm.

According to Dr. Bill Prokop, DVM at Arm & Hammer, there are three areas to focus on:

- 1. Pre-calving** – provide a palatable, well balanced transition cow diet to manage calcium levels, deliver adequate protein for foetus growth and mammary gland development, and thereby prepare the cow for a successful onset of lactation.
- 2. At calving** – identify high-risk cows for possible calcium supplementation and have a standard operating procedure (SOP) in place for any clinical milk fevers.
- 3. Post-calving** – record cases of transition disorders to monitor the effectiveness of points 1 and 2, and rule-out any other confounding pre-existing stressors during the Close-Up period.

“We can improve animal welfare, reduce veterinary costs, improve milk yields and reproductive health all by implementing a successfully managed and monitored milk fever prevention plan,” says Dr. Prokop.

Research with a negative DCAD product shows that on average, transition cow diseases are reduced 56% using a negative DCAD diet as part of a milk fever prevention strategy². Dr. Prokop finishes by saying; “All the attributes of a successful next lactation are contingent upon a sound transition program, not least of which is based upon effective prevention of hypocalcemia both clinical and subclinical.”

Prevention is always better than cure, and milk fever is no different. ■



Dr. Prokop has over 40 years of experience serving the dairy industry as a veterinarian through private practice, industry consultation, industry technical service, nutritionist and full-time dairy manager. In addition to his focus on animal health, he has also served as an advocate for continual improvement on dairy farms with an emphasis on animal wellbeing through the development and incorporation of best management practices to provide the best overall care to dairy animals. His experience also includes serving as the manager of the Cornell Research Dairy. Today, Dr. Prokop brings his vast experience and education to dairy farmers, nutritionists and veterinarians as part of the technical services team for Arm & Hammer Animal Nutrition.

Reference:

1 Venjakob, P.L., Borchardt, S. and Heuwieser, W., 2017. Hypocalcemia—Cow-level prevalence and preventive strategies in German dairy herds. *Journal of dairy science*, 100(11), pp.9258-9266. **2** Santos, J.E.P., Lean, I.J., Golder, H. and Block, E., 2019. Meta-analysis of the effects of prepartum dietary cation-anion difference on performance and health of dairy cows. *Journal of dairy science*, 102(3), pp.2134-2154.

NEXT IN THE SERIES: We look at dietary options to prevent milk fever.



DON'T MISS A POST!

Follow **#DryCowKnowHow** to read every article in the series!

