

Veterinary Notes for the Farmer

Discussions on First-Aid Measures

Contributed by the Livestock Division

Treatment of Milk-fever in the Dairy Cow

WITH the approach of the calving season, it appears advisable to record a few notes on the fairly well recognised condition known under the name of milk-fever. This disease of the dairy cow is known under several other names; it is recognised as occurring in ewes, and has also been recorded in the sow.

In the first place, it is necessary for the dairy farmer to be able to recognise the disease and to make a correct diagnosis before attempting any line of treatment. The disease is most frequently seen in the high-producing dairy cow in good condition at calving time. Young heifers are seldom, if ever, affected, and cows in poor condition do not commonly become affected. The disease is seen normally within the first few days after calving. It may be seen a day or two before calving or actually at the time of calving, when parturition may be delayed through the disease supervening.

Symptoms

The symptoms take a rather defined course. The affected cow is restless

and rather excited in the early stages, but these symptoms may not be observed if the cow is in the paddock. Gradually an unsteadiness in the hind-quarters develops; the animal may knuckle over at the fetlock joints, and eventually goes down. After attempts to rise, the animal gradually lapses into unconsciousness or coma. The animal may be found in the paddock in this condition.

The comatose condition is recognised by the sleepy appearance of the animal and the deep and rather shallow breathing. The reflex action of the eye is absent. The animal may be found with the head turned into the flank or lying flat on the side, when a certain degree of tympany is nearly always present.

Treatment

The treatment of the affected animal which can be most conveniently carried out by the farmer consists mainly of udder inflation. The details in connection with udder inflation may be briefly outlined as follows. It is necessary to strip out each quarter of the udder to remove the milk present.

The teats should be washed and cleaned, and only a clean sterilised teat syphon used for introducing the air in the quarters. It is advisable to have the teat syphon boiled each time before use.

Quite effective cheap outfits are available for pumping the air into the quarters, but in the absence of an outfit a teat syphon may be attached to the rubber tubing of an ordinary enema syringe. This is preferable to the use of the bicycle pump and valve so commonly seen. It is almost impossible to prevent the introduction of infection when a bicycle pump is used, and many cases of mastitis from suppurative abscesses to gangrene of the udder have been seen following the use of dirty instruments.

Inflation

Each quarter of the udder requires to be distended with air until a marked distension is apparent to the touch. A partial inflation due to a defective pump frequently results in failure to get the cow on to its feet, or may be responsible for a relapse.

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