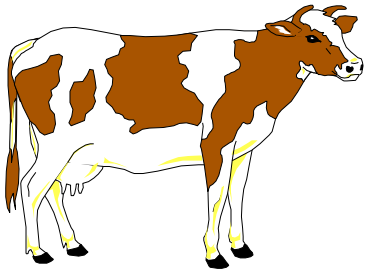
WOOD VETERINARY GROUP

August Newsletter



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BADGER VACCINATION

There is no doubt that we were initially against the idea. Culling would produce a much faster reduction in TB, at a much lower cost and it is known to be effective, whereas vaccination may or may not work. However, having attended a meeting a few weeks ago we now wonder if we should support it – at least partly because there does not seem to be any other option!

There will be 6 trial areas, one of which, as can be seen from the map below, involves most of our practice. This will be the first trial area to start vaccination (in June 2010), and farms will be asked to enrol from December 2009 onwards.

The proposals are as follows

- Farms will be asked to sign up voluntarily
- When signed up, your farm will be surveyed for badger setts
- Traps will be placed near to setts, and all badgers caught will be given vaccine by intramuscular injection (which means its 4 x the dose of the usual intradermal)
- Once vaccinated badgers will be spray marked so that if they are caught again the next night they can be released
- This procedure is repeated every year for 5 years. This is because vaccine works best in younger cubs, and the average life span of the badger is 3 years, so after 5 years most of the population should have received vaccine when young.
- There are, of course, lots of questions surrounding vaccination. For example
- Can we be sure that younger cubs will be trapped and vaccinated? Woodchester Park trials have shown that younger cubs (present in May and June) do trap OK, but the Woodchester badgers have now been trapped so often that perhaps they are no longer typical
- Vaccine will have no beneficial effect on badgers already infected, but could it have an adverse effect, eg by increasing shedding?
- It will take at least 5 years to reduce the level of TB in badgers, so we cannot expect to see any reduction in TB in cattle for 7 years – can we wait that long? Culling would clearly produce a much more rapid effect.
- Will vaccination produce perturbation? We are told the Woodchester trials said not (but see above), because badgers are not being removed.
- Will vaccination further increase badger numbers? DEFRA tell us that badgers do not die from TB, but others say that 10% of all badger deaths are currently caused by TB
- How will we measure the effects of vaccination? Is the number of new herd breakdowns a sufficiently accurate measure? A better system (and being done in Ireland) would be to compare culled badgers from vaccinated versus non vaccinated areas after 5 years and look at their incidence of TB

- Would it not be better to use the oral vaccine (currently on trial in Ireland) which is much cheaper to administer, could be used over a wider area and in the long run much more likely to produce a sustainable control?

There will be lots more queries. What we have in mind is to distribute information as it arises, then organise a meeting with the DEFRA Vaccination group for you to ask your own questions before the farm registrations start. One thing is certain – we at long last seem to be at a point **where badgers are accepted as a significant reservoir of infection and action needs to be taken**. We have at least moved on from John Bourne and the ISG telling us that cattle testing alone would control the disease!

OVERDUE TB TESTS – ZERO TOLERANCE!

DEFRA are now threatening us that if overdue tests are not completed within 3 months of their due date they will deduct 15% from your single farm payment. We are reasonably well up together, but there are a few odd animals, tracings, retests etc that are easily overlooked and need doing. We shall be trying to complete these over the next month or two, but with the holiday season it's never easy.

REPORTING ABORTIONS

Just another reminder to PLEASE report all abortions, either to Wendy or direct to DEFRA. We still run into difficulties with sampling because previous abortions have not been reported.

AN ALTERNATIVE TO ORBESEAL?

Orbeseal must have been one of the biggest advances in mastitis control for the past 10 years! By sealing the base of the teat and the teat canal it reduces the number of new infections during the first two weeks and last two weeks of the dry period, and effectively halves the number of new cases of mastitis in the first three months after calving. Cases of toxic mastitis are now much less common than a few years ago.

A new competitor product may soon be on the market. Its data sheet information relates to its use as a teat canal seal only. We are not given any information as to what the product contains, i.e. its ingredients are not stated, and it is designed to seal the teat canal only i.e. it does not fill the bottom on the teat sinus, as is the case with Orbeseal. As there is no reference to the product have any claim for mastitis control we assume that no trial work has been carried out to prove its efficacy. We have not yet decided what to do, but at the moment we feel that it may be best to let other practices try it first, to see how they get on.

VENTED LINERS

Hopefully you remember the feature at our Open Day in January. The two farms using them are both delighted with the results and both have low cell counts and clinical mastitis. You can ask more about these at the Home Farm Open Day. Ask Milk Rite if you are interested.

COW AND BADGER CONTACT

Another piece of information in the jigsaw has come to light. Apparently cows that are higher ranking and socially dominant are more likely to get TB, and more likely to contact badgers. A recent study by Mike Hutchings, SAC, using data loggers, has shown that some cows are particularly curious, and sniff at badgers more than other cows in the herd. For these cows the number of close associations between badgers and cattle is much higher than was previously thought, thus explaining how disease is transmitted. Not only do these cows come into close contact with badgers, but they are also more likely to sniff other cows, further transmitting disease.