

XLVets is a novel and exciting initiative, conceived from within the veterinary profession aimed at supporting UK agriculture as it faces challenges in the 21st century.

We are a group of farm animal committed veterinary practices, and as such our policy is to work together, alongside commercial research and manufacturing companies, to share best practice on advice and disease prevention initiatives so providing the first point of call on health management and consultancy advice and facing up to the plethora of current on-farm consultancy advice other than from the veterinary surgeon. We are interested in the development and creation of markets for the economic advantage and support of our clients' long term future and prosperity.

The aim of the group is to put veterinary surgeons at the heart of their clients' farming enterprises, offering independent and high quality advice alongside other specialist advisers. We are dedicated to the survival and growth of the livestock farming industry and wish to work with like-minded, committed professionals.

We are constantly seeking cost-effective preventative medicines and consumables and looking to advise on best practice.



For further information, please contact your local XLVets Practice.

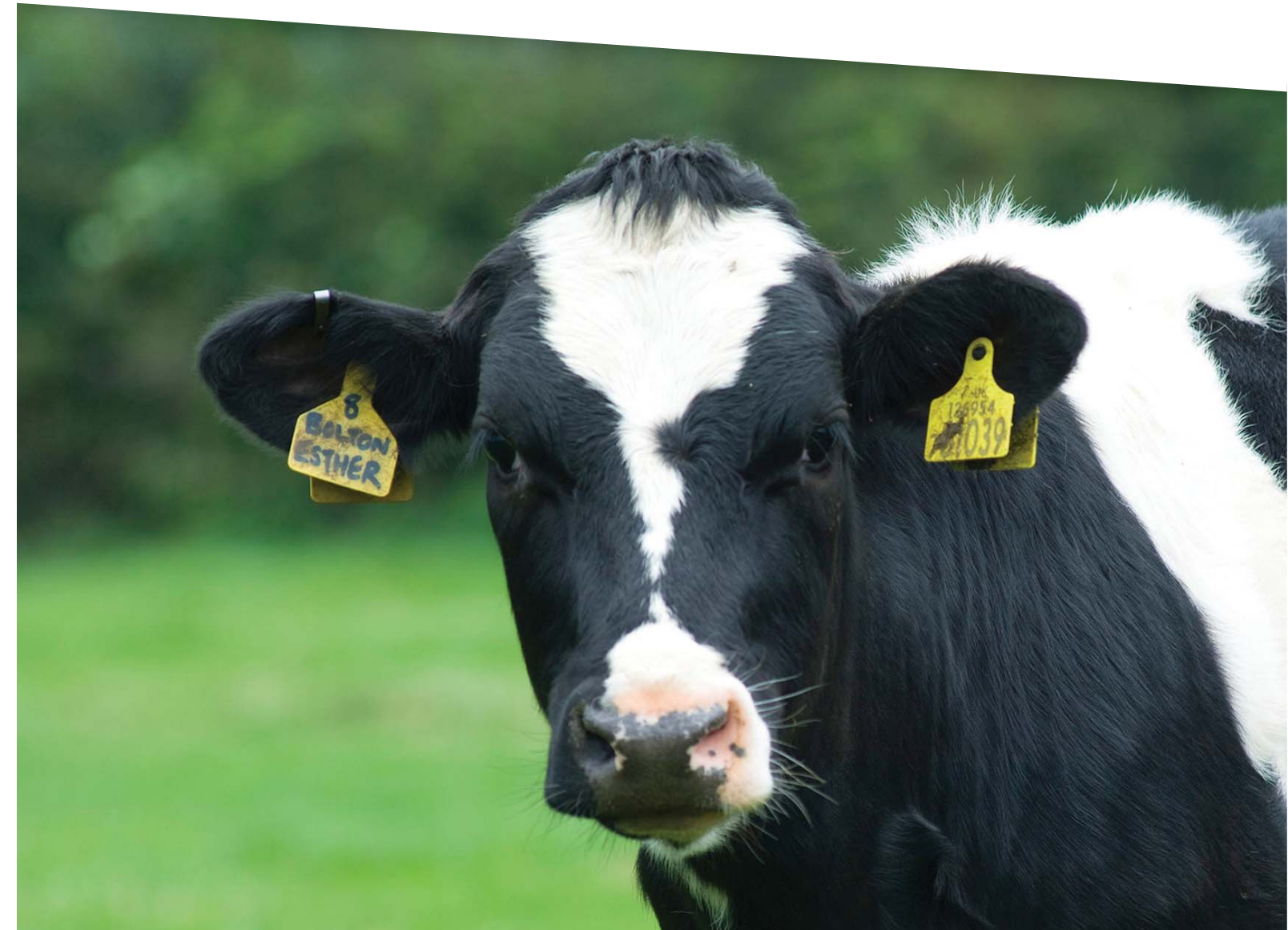
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Committed to UK Farming
EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE



Our primary aims are 4 fold:

1. To be a primary source of on-farm advice and the central co-ordinating consultant for other farm services for our clients.
2. To be committed to the sharing of current best practice advice to our clients through direct XLVets newsletters and client training, associated with our own high levels of Continuing Professional Development (CPD).
3. To be highly competitive in the health and medicines market with not only Prescription Only Medicines (POMs) but also re-establishing the vet as a primary source for on-farm Pharmacy and Merchants List (PML) and other medicinal and consumable products supported by impartial professional advice.
4. To improve our own efficiencies and reduce our costs by economies of scale over a wide range of practice needs and requirements.



FACT SHEET 12

THE PERIPARTURIENT COW

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The Periparturient Cow

The time immediately around calving is the most critical part of a cow's year. Higher yielding dairy cows at calving will always run into deficits in energy, minerals and protein. So the aim of management in this period is to minimise these deficits and reduce the load of infection from the cow's environment.

Cows are also not able to eat so much and their immune system is suppressed. This makes the cow very vulnerable to diseases, and the risk of cow mortality is highest at this time. Furthermore, disease problems around calving, which are not fatal, can have a large impact on the following lactation.

Milk fever

The most common problem at this time is milk fever. Milk fever brings its own problems, including sometimes the total loss of the cow, either directly from the effects of hypocalcaemia or from injuries caused when struggling to rise. There are also many problems that follow on from milk fever:

- A high proportion of cows that have milk fever will retain their afterbirths and many of these subsequently develop metritis (womb infections). Cows with retained afterbirths or metritis will produce over 7kg less per day for their first three weeks of lactation. They take over three weeks longer to show in heat and when they are served, their chance of getting in calf is 20% below that of cows, which have not had metritis!
- Milk fever can also increase the likelihood of getting mastitis in the following lactation by eight times, and this is even more pronounced with coliform mastitis which increases the risk by nine times.

Milk fever can be controlled by the use of DCAB or more often partial DCAB diets in the last few weeks of the dry period. These diets are now a vital part of management of the periparturient cow. The control of milk fever with these types of diet has brought huge improvements in the health of cows at calving and in their subsequent lactation. A nutritional advisor working with your vet can advise on what is suitable on individual farms.

Feeding times and space requirements

All cows should have free access to feed when they want it and this is even more critical in the late dry period and early lactation. Cows are a herd animal and will want to feed at the same time as the rest of the herd i.e. just after the feed has been freshly delivered. This can be critical if feeding space is limited, particularly for smaller younger cows and heifers. On most systems cows need thirty inches of feed space each. If this goes wrong, then for every ten minutes that feeding time is reduced, the risk of metritis and all the subsequent problems this brings will be doubled.

Changing groups and pens

Changing groups and isolating cows or heifers can be bad for health.. Cows should ideally stay in their dry group and have an area of the pen, which can be sectioned off as a calving pen or at least be kept next to the dry pen. Cows should only be moved when they are close to calving, ideally once feet are showing. But do not disturb calving cows any more than necessary. Cows should not stay in the calving pen any longer than necessary i.e. two days or less. Any longer increases the chance of disease.

Cow comfort and hygiene

Standing time is increased around calving, so it is particularly important to have a comfortable environment, for both lying and standing. Cow comfort and standing time can have effects on calving difficulties, metritis and lameness in early lactation.

Hygiene is also critical at this time when the cow's immunity is depressed. They need clean and dry bedding to minimise the risks of mastitis and metritis in particular.

- Use a partial (or full) DCAB diet in the last weeks of the dry period
- Feed periparturient cows together with fresh feed and enough space
- Do not disturb calving cows more than necessary and minimise group changes
- House in clean dry comfortable areas

