North Star Veterinary Services Newsletter

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Preventing a Displaced Abomasum (Twisted Stomach)

We are often asked by clients if there are certain times of the year that we see more DA's than others. There might be a slight seasonality to them but most of the time it's something farm specific that is contributing to a DA "outbreak"

There are **four main factors** associated with the occurrence of DA's in **cows:**

1. Around calving time cows reduce their feed intake. This is a time when the calf takes up a huge part of the abdominal cavity and pushes against the rumen. If the cow has not kept her rumen full of feed (especially roughage), then after calving there is a chance for the abomasum to move under the rumen and become "displaced".

2. The second factor associated with DAs is coming down with milk fever or being on the verge of coming down with milk fever (hypocalcemia). An adequate level of blood calcium is necessary for the maintenance of normal rumen and abomasal contractions, which keeps them in their proper location.

3. The third factor associated with DAs occurs when cows get rumen acidosis caused by an abnormal amount of volatile fatty acids. These VFAs and gas get into the abomasum causing a decrease in the motility of both the abomasum and the rumen. This excess gas can cause the abomasum to float and become displaced.

4. The fourth factor associated with DAs is **cows that are too fat** when they are dried off and are still too fat at calving time. Over conditioned cows don't have good appetites just prior to calving and don't eat well after calving. Lack of appetite leads to less rumen fill and lack of maintenance of the rumen mat or raft (normal rumen function). Fat cows that don't eat well start mobilizing their fat reserves for energy and are prone to have ketosis, retained placentas and other problems that can increase their chance of getting DAs.

The best way to prevent a displaced abomasum (DA or twisted stomach) is to work with a nutritionist on proper dry cow and fresh cow nutrition. there are a lot of specific nutritional needs during the pre-fresh and fresh period of a cow. If you are seeing a high percentage of DAs in your herd, speak to your nutritionist and veterinarian to help you pinpoint the problem or problems.

Some basic ways to help prevent DAs

1. Have a pre-fresh group where cows are on a specified pre-fresh diet for 3-4 weeks prior to calving.

2. Have a fresh group where cows are on a specified diet for 3-4 weeks

3. Push up feed frequently especially in these two groups of cows and never let them run out of feed

4. These cows should have lots of bunk space so they should never have to compete for feed, and they should have easy access to clean water

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5. Always provide cows with easy access to water right after calving especially if they are moved into a calving pen for the calving process. Cows will often drink 10-15 gallons of warm water right after calving. not only does this help fill and expand the rumen that was squished by the calf, but it also helps replenish the fluids lost during the calving process.

6. If your cows are not on a good pre-fresh or fresh cow ration, it may be a very good idea to use an oral calcium supplement like Bovikalc, right after they calve, in your 2nd lactation cows and older.

7. Pre-fresh cows should be fed low potassium long stemmed or coarsely chopped forages. Limit corn silage to 10-15lbs/cow/day. This is to help prevent milk fever. They should get 8-10lbs of grain mix, and a pre fresh mineral pack. Talk to your nutritionist to come up with a balanced diet using your forages.

8. Fresh cows should be fed a ration higher in protein, energy, and effective fiber that the lactating ration because feed intake at this time is lower. From a DA prevention point of view, 5-8lbs of a long stemmed really palatable hay and similar amount of whole cottonseed can help build and maintain a really nice rumen mat which prevents grain from going into the abomasum and fermenting there causing gas to build up in the abomasum.

9. Monitor dry matter levels in the feed. This is especially important in TMR fed herds. A change in dry matter can completely throw off the composition of what you think you are feeding the cows. it may look great on paper, but that does not mean that is the ration in front of them.

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