

Sick Calves, Dead Calves, and Open Cows

What is causing it in the Parkland?

Herd investigations over the past several years have identified numerous factors and causative agents.

1. Nutrition
 - a. Poor hay quality
 - i. Fungal abortions/stillborn
 - ii. Mouldy clover causing bleeding disorders
 - iii. Lack of available energy (poor digestibility)
 - iv. Lack of protein
 - v. Mycotoxins – causing circulation problems resulting in frozen ears, tails and feet
 - b. Vitamin A
 - i. Low in all stored feeds
 - ii. Always require supplementation during the winter
 - c. Vitamin E
 - i. Low in all stored feeds
 - ii. Required for the immune system to work
 - iii. Always requires supplementation
 - d. Lack of feed testing
 - i. Guessing at the digestibility and protein content of feed can lead to huge errors
2. Environment
 - a. Mouldy straw bedding
 - i. Abortion and stillbirths
 - ii. Herd expansion (is happening again!) but often without increasing the calving area leading to overcrowding
3. Biosecurity (introduction of new “bugs”)
 - a. Addition of cows at or near calving
 - i. Huge stress on cows affecting their immune system
 - b. Purchase of suckling calf – the best way to buy a scour problem
 - c. Herd expansion from multiple sources
 - i. Every extra farm increases risk of disease
 - d. Herd expansion
 - i. Purchase of bred cows/heifers without knowing vaccination history

Selenium Deficiency

Currently, selenium deficiency is rarely seen. Some herds are now on the opposite extreme and are at risk of toxicity. A high level of selenium in all trace minerals, combined with injections given to cows and calves is working quite well to prevent selenium deficiency so keep doing it.

Copper Deficiency

90% of herds with health or reproductive problems have been found to be copper deficient. Where Selenium status was 20 years ago, is where copper status is now. Copper is needed for multiple body functions. What we are seeing clinically is decreased immune function (increased illness), and reduced reproductive rates in cattle.

Copper status of a herd can be determined by a combination of blood and liver samples. Once status is known, we can determine what supplementation is required.