

Know your Status series – Neospora

Neosporosis is the most frequently diagnosed cause of abortion in cattle in the UK. It is caused by *Neospora caninum*, an apicomplexan protozoal parasite with worldwide distribution.

How is Neosporosis transferred?

An infected cow will usually pass the infection on to her calf while it is still in the womb—this is called vertical transmission. If it isn't aborted, the calf is usually born healthy, but will in turn infect its own calves.

The second way that cattle become infected is through consuming feed or water contaminated with oocysts, or eggs, from the parasite, or grazing on contaminated pastures. These oocysts are shed in the faeces of dogs, and probably of wild canines including coyotes, foxes and wolves. These animals become infected by eating infected animals, placentas or foetuses.

What are the effects of Neosporosis?

Abortions from dam-to-foetus infections (vertical transmission) tend to be sporadic. Therefore, if your herd has an outbreak, or "storm," of laboratory-confirmed *Neospora* abortions, you should suspect infection by contamination of feed and/or water.

The cost of abortion, which involves not just the loss of the calf but also reduced milk production and additional breeding costs, is well documented.

How can you test for Neosporosis?

The Neosporosis status of your herd can be established by carrying out a snapshot bleed. The snapshot bleed involves testing a specified proportion of the female breeding herd 10 to 4 weeks before their expected calving date (antibody to *N. caninum* fluctuates throughout the life of an infected animal), or testing calves less than two weeks old.

The number of cattle to be tested varies with herd size; for example with a herd of between 101 - 150 cows we would test 53. Herds over 151 cows would need 61 cattle tested. The test costs £8.30 per cow as of May 2016.

What do you do with seropositive animals?

Sero-positive animals are approximately six to seven times more likely to abort compared to sero-negative animals, so they should be removed from the herd at the end of lactation or bred to a beef bull.

What next?

Please contact one of the farm animal team for more advice on the control of this costly parasite.

Lanes Farm Vets Location & Contact Information.

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