NADIS Cattle Disease Focus

Ringworm in Cattle

The NADIS data show that as winter progresses, particularly if wet, there is a significant increase in the numbers of cattle, especially growing cattle and calves, with skin disease. Ringworm is one of the commonest skin diseases in such cattle.

What is Ringworm

Ringworm is caused by infection with a fungus that lives in hairy skin.

Clinical Signs

♦ Grey-white areas of skin with an ash like surface
♦ Usually circular in outline and slightly raised
♦ Size of lesions very variable, can become very extensive
♦ In calves most commonly found around eyes, on ears and on back, in adult cattle chest and legs more common

Diagnosis

• On the clinical signs described above
• Culture of skin sample can be used in unusual cases to confirm ringworm and identify type of fungus

Treatment

• Ringworm is usually self-limiting, this means that the skin will usually heal without treatment. However this can take up to nine months.
• The most commonly used treatment was griseofulvin in the feed, however, this is no longer available for use in food producing animals.
• The only remaining treatments are sprays. These are expensive, but can be very effective.
• Many unlicensed treatments have been used from snail slime to copper sprays. They are cheap but have no proven efficacy.
Control

◊ The environment is the major source of infective fungi. Effective control of ringworm will only occur if the environment is properly cleaned and disinfected. This must be done between each batch of calves.

◊ Vaccination will significantly reduce the number of animals affected with ringworm, and affected calves will have fewer, smaller crusts. On most farms, this may be of little benefit, but vaccination can be extremely useful on farms with a severe problem, particularly if this is in adult cattle.

◊ Ringworm can spread from cattle to humans. Thus if there is a lot of human:cow contact, such as on open farms, vaccination is essential if ringworm has been previously identified.

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The Meat and Livestock Commission is a sponsor of NADIS (National Animal Disease Information Service), which is a network of 40 veterinary practices and 6 veterinary colleges monitoring diseases in cattle, sheep and pigs in the UK.