NADIS Cattle Disease Bulletin

Silage Eye in Cattle

*NADIS is a network of 40 veterinary practices and 6 veterinary colleges monitoring diseases in cattle sheep and pigs in the UK.*

The NADIS data show that the number of cows with bovine iritis (more commonly known as silage eye) increases rapidly from December onwards and reaches a peak in March.
Click here to view graph.

**What is silage eye?**

Silage eye is an eye infection caused by the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*, more commonly associated with the brain disease listeriosis. It is primarily associated with the feeding of silage (which explains its common name and the time of year in which it occurs), in particularly big bale silage. The proportion of cattle affected is very variable (from 10 to 80% of a group), with higher proportions predominating

**Clinical Signs**

1. Profuse eye discharge: Originally clear, becoming sticky and purulent
2. Temporary blindness
3. Bluish opacity of the surface of the eye (the cornea), which can become yellow as pus develops
4. Bulges in the iris, with white discolouration.
5. Very painful, especially when eye is examined

**Diagnosis**

On clinical signs noted above, if this condition has not occurred on your farm before, veterinary advice is essential

**Treatment**

Systemic antibiotics are much more effective than antibiotics applied directly onto the eye. Ask your veterinarian for advice on the best antibiotic to use.

**Prevention**

Silage eye occurs for two reasons:

1. The silage is contaminated with Listeria during its production (usually from soil) and this Listeria is not killed during the subsequent fermentation (which is why big bale silage is more commonly associated with silage eye)
2. The feeding of the forage is associated with eye damage as the animals compete for food.

Thus prevention has two main strands

- Minimising the feeding of potentially contaminated silage, either by feeding clamp silage rather than big bale, or by minimising the soil contamination at harvest
- Minimising the competition at the feed face by increasing the space available per animal.

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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.