



Countryside Veterinary Clinic

September 2016 Newsletter

Twinning in Dairy Cattle A Persistent Problem

Peter G. Ostrum, DVM

There is nothing more discouraging than finding a dead twin in a cow that calved 1 – 3 days earlier with what seemed to have been an uneventful delivery.

Twinning in dairy cattle has been increasing over time to the point where 5 -10% of all pregnancies result in a twinning event. In many herds the incidence is even higher. Unfortunately, the final outcome of twinning is usually not positive for either the dam or the calves. If she doesn't abort or calve early, cows will be at greater risk for dystocia (difficult calving), retained placenta and uterine infections. Ketosis and displaced abomasums are not uncommon as cows carrying twins often calve with poor body condition. Reproductive performance in the following lactation will often be compromised as twinning increases both average days open and services per conception. Calves that are born alive tend to be smaller and are prone to pre-weaning sickness and death. In addition, heifers born with a twin bull are often freemartins making them useless as dairy replacements as they will be infertile.

Genetics may play a role as cows that have had twins in the past are more likely to have twins in the future. In addition, certain cow families are known to be more susceptible to twinning. High milk production may also contribute to twinning and is considered a significant risk factor. (Keith Pfendler) Approximately 90% of all twins occur from two eggs being released (double ovulation) and fertilized rather than one fertilized egg splitting. Researchers have also observed that high producers are more likely to double ovulate than low producing cows which may produce more twins.

Pregnancy detection using ultrasound provides better ability to visualize the presence of multiple fetuses and has given us a great advantage over rectal palpation in diagnosing twins. Most will be accurately detected early in pregnancy (30 – 75 days post breeding). Ultrasound can better identify cows that have double ovulated and therefore may be at risk for carrying twins. There is no fool-proof method of twin detection, however, and some will inevitably be missed.

Management Strategies to Lessen the Negative Impacts of Twinning:

1. While not a common practice on all farms it may be appropriate in certain cases to abort the twins with prostaglandin. Discuss this option with your veterinarian as these cows can be difficult to rebreed and may conceive with twins again.
2. All cows diagnosed with twins should be rechecked as they're at higher risk for spontaneous abortion.
3. Dry cows off 2 – 3 weeks early as cows with twins often calve early.
4. At dry off feed a pre-fresh ration until calving to avoid excessive weight loss.
5. Be prepared to provide assistance at calving to avoid complications and prevent stillborn calves.
6. Remember that every cow should be examined for the presence of a second calf after delivery. Warm water, soap and a clean rectal sleeve is all that's required for a vaginal/uterine exam.

Discuss the issue of twinning with your herd veterinarian to develop the best plan for pregnancy detection and dry/fresh cow management.

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American Dairy Association and Dairy Council – ADADC District 2 Meeting Notice

As part of their American Dairy Association and Dairy Council membership each farm will receive two free meals. Please attend and take advantage of this opportunity to have your questions answered. There will also be a presentation of your award winning programs.

Counties: Jefferson, Lewis

Location: Ridgeview Inn
6912 Bardo Road
Lowville, NY 13367

Date: October 11, 2016

Time: 6:30 pm – Punch
7:00 pm – Dinner

Contact: Peggy Murray (315) 771-4617

Thank you to everyone who came to our picnic!

Also special thanks to **Zoetis, Boehringer Ingelheim, and Merck** for helping sponsor the event.

Our door prize winners are:

Keith Roggie	\$100 Countryside Gift Certificate:
Bruce Hartzler	\$100 Countryside Gift Certificate:
Anthony Burkholder	\$100 Countryside Gift Certificate:
Nate Yousey	Work gloves donated by Merck and \$50 Countryside Gift Certificate:
Joe Robbins	Flashlight donated by Merck and \$50 Countryside Gift Certificate:

Read our newsletters: Remember that if you spot your name in our newsletter and call us within 5 days of the billing date, we will give you a \$10.00 credit on your bill