Milk Fever

Animals Affected

- Older, especially cows greater than 5 years old.
- The Jersey cow is particularly prone.
- Overfat cows are also at significant risk.

Signs

- Cow is down, weak with her head turned in against her side.
- Cows show a rapid improvement when Calcium is administered.
- No energy, animals cannot get up.

Diagnosis

- Low blood Calcium and Phosphorus levels.
- High blood Potassium level.
- Low dry matter intake and reduced rumen activity.

Conditions

- Same cows often have had Milk Fever before.
- Dry cow mineral not fed at the correct level or time period.
- Dry cows were fed high Potassium forage i.e. grazed grass.

Cause

- Older cows do not absorb Calcium well.
- Older cows release less Calcium from their bones.
- There is a high Calcium requirement as animals come close to calving.

Prevention

- Dry cows need to be fit, Body Condition Score 3.
- Extended dry cow periods only serve to fatten cows too much.
- Reduce the intake of grazed grass and grass silage.
- Feed palatable clean forage, no mouldy silage.
- Feed 2kgs of clean barley straw or hay to encourage the rumen.
- Feed Superchoice Pre-Calver Minerals for the full duration of the dry period.
- Ensure that every cow is getting dry cow minerals, feed twice per day.
- Allow for a little wastage as windy conditions can blow minerals away.
- Pre-Calver minerals need to contain at least 20% Magnesium.
- Phosphorus is also important, should be supplemented.
• Vitamin D is also important in Calcium regulation and high levels are required.
• Mineral blocks are an inconsistent means of feeding minerals.
• Do not overcrowd or restrict feed space as shy cows will be bullied.
• Dry cows need room to exercise and express themselves.
• The dry cow diet needs to be 14 to 16% protein in the dry matter
• Feed 1 to 2 kgs of concentrate for two weeks pre calving.
• Separate cows within 10 days of calving into a separate group.
• Keep all feed fresh, renew daily and provide clean and fresh water.
• Keeps rumens full with palatable feed as cows get close to calving.
• A little tender loving care goes a long way.

Prevention is better than cure.