

How Selective Dry Cow Therapy (SDCT) could help overcome some Brexit Challenges!



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In the event of a no-deal Brexit, concerns about the availability of animal medicines means that there has never been a better time to consider your drying off procedures and look at whether implementing selective dry cow therapy (SDCT) to reduce antibiotic usage is suitable for your herd



While there are reassurances from NOAH (National Office of Animal Health) that extensive planning has been taking place to ensure as little disruption as possible to the availability of veterinary medicines produced in the EU, continuity of supply cannot be guaranteed. Potential issues could arise if there is last minute panic-buying to stock up on veterinary products before the end of October, possibly leading to short-term issues with availability. There is also likely to be an increase in the cost of EU produced medicines due to import tariffs if a No-Deal Brexit occurs.

With increasing pressure to monitor and reduce antibiotic usage in the dairy industry, drying off suitable cows that meet specific selection criteria with only an internal teat sealant is starting to become the norm. Research has provided evidence that there is no benefit in using antibiotics in low cell count cows (<200,000 cells/ml and no clinical mastitis in last three months before drying off).

It is important that you discuss with your vet the appropriate selection criteria for your herd. The starting point is to evaluate herd health status based on historic bulk tank cell counts, mastitis rates (as well as mastitis incidence in early lactation), and the main pathogens responsible for mastitis outbreaks. On an individual cow basis monthly cell count data and accurate mastitis records are a must.

The industry standard recommendation is to dry off cows with a teat sealant only if the last three monthly cell count recordings are below 200,000 cells/ml and there has not been a case of mastitis during this time. However, it may be good practice to initially impose stricter criteria, for example, only use a teat sealant in cows with SCC less than 150,000 cells/ml in the last three recordings and monitor progress through mastitis cases of dry period origin (those occurring within the first 30 days) and dry period protection rates before relaxing criteria, which may allow more cows to be dried off without antibiotics.

Hygiene standards at drying off are even more critical when practicing SDCT and the gold standard is to disinfect cleaned teats with surgical spirit soaked in cotton wool, and use a fresh pair of gloves for each cow. More information on recommended drying off practices can be found in the following link: http://webinars.nadis.org.uk/media/42749/selective_dry_cow_therapy.pdf

Regardless of whether practicing SDCT or using antibiotics at drying off, dry cow management is important to minimise new udder infections during this high risk period and in freshly calved cows. Housing hygiene, good ventilation and not over-stocking facilities are critical to the success of SDCT, along with nutrition during the dry period to maximise the cow's immunity to help resist infection.

