

Herd Health Report
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Spring Checklist

Spring is one of the most invigorating times of the year and one of the busiest times on a dairy farm. Therefore, it is easy to overlook a few things that can cost you money by neglecting them.

After 36 years of veterinary practice, here is what I see being missed quite often.

We will deal with young stock first. You are going to let them out of the barn or pens where they over-wintered to let them have some grass, fresh air and sunshine. I always called this Dr. Green (he was Mother Nature's doctor, who fixed a lot of winter time ills). First, take a walk or 4-wheeler drive into the paddock or grassy acreage and get rid of the junk. You would not believe how many twine string entanglements, around necks and hocks that I saw every summer. Pick up wire, sharp pieces of metal, anything that could cut your livestock. Don't let your paddock become a junk yard which can become an accident waiting to happen. While you are at it, do some fence checking to make sure it is up to par.

After the environment is back into shape, it is time to check on the young stock. If you live in an area with Blackleg- you must vaccinate for it. Blackleg can live in the soil for 40+ years, so once Blackleg farm, always a Blackleg farm.

Next get your "free-choice" equipment ready. Young pre-breeding heifers on pasture should have mineral and salt available at all times. Minerals are often neglected on growing young stock; they should also never be without a calcium/phosphorus source at any time. Make provisions to feed kelp free-choice as well. Young stock on free-choice kelp rarely get pinkeye. My personal opinion is that kelp works much better than any vaccine for preventing pinkeye, and you get many added benefits from kelp which you don't on vaccine. Spend your pinkeye vaccination money on kelp.

If you have put any calcium on your pastures, like gypsum or any type of lime product, that is where you want your young stock pastured as the lime and gypsum reduces the Johne's bacteria that may be out there.

The cow herd should be vaccinated at spring turnout onto pasture. This is the optimal time to vaccinate. I encounter a lot of closed herds. These are herds that have no cattle coming in and that sell off the extras. Many of these closed herds do not do any vaccinating of any sort. The Organic World can go a long time without any problems, as you have changed the soil and gone to a high forage diet and thus your animals have a very strong immune system. If you don't vaccinate your herd and have a good immune system without any problems, great. I always say that if the system isn't broke, don't fix it. You should always keep working on your immune system.

Also for the adult milking herd, always keep mineral and salt free-choice. With the advent of the lap top computer and the nutritional number crunchers, they did away with the free-choice system. Every cow and animal is different. Bovines should always have minerals and salt free-choice as a safety net, so they can pick up extra when they need it. Remember, a bovine is an herbivore grazer. She would eat 100 different plants in 5 days if she was in a diverse biological environment.

The spring of the year is also the time to clean the internal parasites out, especially from young stock. Animals under 2 years of age are quite prone to internal parasites. Before you put them on pasture, or when you move them to new spring loafing areas, use a good biological wormer. There have been a number of good new wormers for organic producers (with research data) developed over the last few years.

Another issue to be aware of with the advent of grazing; picking up liver flukes. Where I practiced, we had a lot of retention run-off ponds put in at the ends of valleys to control run-off. Any pond that is not spring fed is a real source of flukes. Any low, boggy land, like northern Minnesota, is a fluke haven. Of the flukes I saw in post-mortem, it was always the deer fluke, not the bovine fluke. Therefore I feel that the deer fluke is the real problem. The fluke has an interesting life cycle, in that a snail is required to complete it. If you have a stagnant farm pond these snails will be present in large numbers so fence it off. They are not dry land creatures. If you have marshy areas, wait to graze those areas until they dry. I know this is easier said than done. I never saw an animal die from liver flukes in all my years of practice. I would see 6 to 12 flukes crawl out of a liver from what appeared to be a normal, healthy animal. I feel this is also an immune issue. The better and stronger the immune defenses, the less chance that a few flukes will overrun the system.