

Something to be Said!

There just might be something to the 90 days after a fog, you can expect rain! My husband is a true believer in this. It's a good thing he doesn't believe in all the old sayings, "if you don't eat a devil's egg on Easter, then the gnats will bother you all year". I'm pretty sure deviled eggs weren't on the table! That could have just been something my dad told me, to have me try a deviled egg. He once told my sister that the cow trail in the pasture was part of the Chisolm trail. Her history teacher set her straight! At any rate, with all the rain, foot rot could be around the corner.

Foot rot is a sub-acute or acute necrotic (decaying) infectious disease of cattle, causing swelling and lameness in at least one foot. This disease can cause severe lameness and decreased weight gain or milk production. Lambs will be reluctant to breed, and severely affected animals may need to be culled from the herd. The disease can become chronic, and if treatment is delayed the recovery prognosis is poor. This results in deeper structures of the foot becoming affected. Weight gain is significantly reduced when grazing cattle contract the disease.

Normal healthy skin will not allow the bacteria involved in foot rot to enter the deeper tissues. Mechanical injury or softening and thinning of the interdigital (between the toes) skin by puncture wounds or continuous exposure to wet conditions are necessary to provide entrance points for infectious agents.

Grazing stubble on recently mowed pasture may irritate the interdigital skin as well as standing in environments heavily contaminated with feces and urine. Injury is often caused by walking on abrasive or rough surfaces, stony ground, sharp gravel, hardened mud or standing in a wet and muddy environment for prolonged periods of time. High temperatures and humidity will also cause the skin to chap and crack, leaving it susceptible to bacterial invasion. *Fusobacterium necrophorum* is the bacterium most often isolated from infected feet. This organism is present on healthy skin, but it needs injury or wet skin to enter the deeper tissue.

Foot rot occurs in all ages of cattle, with increased incidences during wet, humid conditions. When case incidence increases in hot and dry conditions, attention must be directed to loafing areas, which are often crowded and extremely wet from urine and feces deposited in small shaded areas. The first signs of foot rot include:

Extreme pain leading to sudden onset of lameness, which increases in severity as the disease progresses. Acute swelling and redness of interdigital tissues and adjacent coronary band. Lesions in the interdigital space are often necrotic along its edges and have a characteristic foul odor. Evenly distributed swelling around both digits and the hairline of the hoof, leading to separation of the claws, fever and loss of appetite.

Treatment of foot rot is usually successful, especially when instituted early in the disease course. Treatment should always begin with cleaning and examining the foot to establish that lameness is actually due to foot rot. A topical treatment of choice should be applied at that time. Some very mild cases will respond to topical therapy only. Most cases require the use of systemic antimicrobial therapy. Your veterinarian may advise on recommended antibiotics and dosages.