

Schmallenberg virus more difficult to discover in cattle

It is more difficult to prove the presence of the Schmallenberg virus [SBV] in calves than it is in lambs; on the other hand, the number of reports on congenitally malformed calves is on the increase.

That the virus is difficult to prove in calves is due to the longer gestation period of cattle compared with sheep. "In cattle, the time gap between SBV infection and parturition is significantly longer than in sheep. This decreases the chance of the virus remaining in the (malformed) foetus until parturition," said Wim van der Poel of the Central Veterinary Institute (CVI). The same is seen in the related Akabane virus in Asia and Australia. This virus is also more difficult to prove in calves than in lambs.

The calves are born infected or with antibodies. Once a test for antibody is available, it will become possible to say with certainty whether they have had been infected by SBV. Until then, the calves are examined for SBV in the same manner as lambs.

The Dutch Food and Wares Authority (nVWA) gets more and more reports of deformed calves. During the last 10 days, 22 cattle farms with deformed calves have been added to the list. Currently, 86 cattle farms have sent deformed calves to the Animal Health Service (GD). The SBV has not yet been demonstrated in even one of the calves examined in the Netherlands. [According to the data as of noon, 18 Jan 2012, the number of holdings reporting the occurrence of congenital malformations is: cattle 101, sheep 129, goats 11. See <http://www.vwa.nl/txmpub/files/?p_file_id=2201855>. - Mod.AS]

The German Veterinary Institute (Friedrich-Loeffler-Institute/FLI), has detected, at the beginning of January 2012, SBV in a stillborn calf. This remains the 1st and only case of the virus shown in calves.

The health service in the German state North Rhine-Westphalia expected in the coming months 15 to 20 per cent of the calves to be born as SBV infected. No forecasts for Dutch calves are yet available. "Assuming that most cattle have been infected during the autumn, I expect a peak of deformed calves in February 2012," said van der Poel.

[byline: Emmy Koeleman]

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communicated by:
Sabine Zentis
Castleview Pedigree English Longhorns
Gut Laach
52385 Nideggen
Germany
<cvalonghorns@aol.com>