



# RETAINED FOETAL MEMBRANES (RFMS) FACT SHEET

## Retained Foetal Membranes (RFMs):

In normal healthy cows the breakdown of protein fibers in the foetal membranes accompanies uterine contraction and expulsion of foetal membranes within 30 minutes to 8 hours. If there is failure of this process and the foetal membranes have not been released after 12 hours from calving, the cow will have a condition known as retained foetal membranes (RFMs). The overall incidence of RFMs is reported as being around 8%.

Retained foetal membranes by itself is not a problem, however it may lead to uterine contamination and metritis (infection of the uterus). This is usually a result of contamination of the membranes in the soil when the cow lies down. Cows that have RFMs are more susceptible to suffering secondary complications such as metritis, mastitis, ketosis and poor reproductive performance.

Several factors have been associated with an increased risk of developing RFMs;

- Mechanical factors – dystocia (esp. difficult calving's in heifers), twins, stillborn calves and abortions.
- Nutritional factors – vitamin and mineral deficiencies, clinical and subclinical milk fever (low Ca).
- Management factors – stress, excessive body condition, calving inductions, unnecessary calving assistance.
- Infectious disease – vibriosis, leptospirosis, brucellosis, pestivirus, bovine herpes virus.

Following a normal calving the body recognizes the foetal cotyledons as now foreign and the cow's immune system attacks them, breaking them down and allowing them to be passed. Any instance that reduces the cows immune system can also increase the likelihood of RFMs.

## Dealing with a cow that has RFMs:

Generally, the cow will pass the membranes within a week and intervention is not always necessary, but in some instances, especially when there has been contamination, assistance will be necessary. Manual removal of the membranes is not recommended. Trimming of the membranes may decrease contamination of the membranes, but it will also reduce the pulling weight of the membranes. In reality a combination of protein break down and the cows immune response will be the primary reason for the eventual passing of membranes. Treatment will include cleaning the cow to maintain hygiene, administering oxytocin, prostaglandin, calcium and antibiotics.

**For more information about RFMS feel free to contact one of the vets at HVC on (02) 60362374.**

