

## Retained Foetal Membranes in the Cow

(please note – it is imperative to understand that these instructions have no relevance to the Horse – retained foetal membranes (4 – 6 hours) in the Horse are an emergency requiring immediate attention)

Retained foetal membranes result from incomplete separation of the foetal membranes from the uterine wall. The separation of the membranes is facilitated by physical uterine contraction and tissue breakdown at the connection points.

Increased rates of retained foetal membranes are seen in a number of situations

- Multiple birth – the attachments reach further into the uterine horns
- Unidentified multiple birth – there may be an unborn twin still inside the uterus
- Placentitis – an infection of the placenta, causing thickening and scarring
- Premature birth/abortion – may relate also to the placentitis
- Drug Induction of calving
- Selenium deficiency
- Uterine inertia – no contractions, for a number of reasons including low calcium
- Caesarean

### Treatment

For whatever reason, the following procedure should be followed.

#### 1. When to intervene

- If the membranes are retained for 24 hours, hormone and pessary therapy can be commenced
- If the cow becomes depressed, or after 4 days, systemic antibiotics are recommended
- After 4 days, manual removal is recommended if possible. See below

#### 2. Internal examination – shoulder length gloves should be worn if over 1 day retention.

- Check for a second calf
- Check for uterine tone/contraction
- Check to see if the cervix is still open
- Gently attempt to remove the membranes – do not pull firmly, it will invariably damage something.

#### 3. Treatment – Prescription drugs require drug regulation be fulfilled – discuss with the veterinary clinic.

- Attend to underlying low calcium
- Uterine tone can be improved with prescription drugs – Oestradiol or Prostaglandin.
- If the cervix is open, an antibiotic and enzyme pessary may be inserted into the uterus.

**4. Assess the general well being of the cow**

- If the cow is bright and alert, leave for up to 4 days before intervention. This will allow breakdown of the utero-placental attachments.
  - If the cow is showing signs of generalised infection, discuss with a veterinarian the use of antibiotics to combat septicaemia.
5. Manual removal of the membranes can only be performed adequately if the cervix is open. Each attachment within reach should be gently worked open with finger pressure. Under no circumstances should removal be attempted by simply pulling the entire mass.