



Pain Relief – Justification

AH.16 -It is recommended that pain relief is used following painful procedures and conditions likely to incur pain including but not limited to calving, lameness or mastitis.

Justification

Pain associated with disease, injury and production events can have a significant impact on animal welfare. Conditions such as lameness, mastitis and difficult calvings are known to cause pain and discomfort that can adversely affect behaviour, mobility, feed intake and recovery. Appropriate use of pain relief can help reduce suffering, support recovery and improve the overall welfare of affected animals. There is growing recognition across the livestock industry that effective pain management should form part of good stockmanship and responsible livestock care.

Research has demonstrated that pain can adversely affect behaviour, mobility, feed intake and normal biological function. Studies in dairy cattle have shown that even mild cases of mastitis result in measurable behavioural changes indicative of pain, highlighting that animals may experience significant discomfort even when clinical signs appear limited. Evidence also demonstrates that the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) as part of appropriate treatment can improve welfare and other outcomes in a range of situations, including mastitis, lameness and calving. Depending on the condition and treatment studied, reported benefits include reduced persistence of lameness, improved reproductive performance, more normal post-calving behaviour and, in some studies, improved longer-term health and productivity.

While much of the published evidence originates from dairy cattle, experts note that the biological and behavioural effects of pain are not species-specific and that similar welfare benefits are likely to be achieved in beef cattle and sheep experiencing comparable painful conditions. Recent industry discussions have highlighted that pain management remains inconsistent across sectors and that analgesic use is often influenced by individual perception of pain rather than the known welfare impact on the animal. Consequently, there is increasing support from veterinarians, researchers and industry stakeholders for a more proactive and consistent approach to pain management.

Providing pain relief where pain is known or likely to occur supports the principles of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations



applicable in each UK nation, all of which require responsible persons to protect animals from unnecessary suffering. Pain management can therefore contribute to both legal compliance and higher welfare outcomes by helping animals recover more comfortably and reducing the negative impacts of pain on health and performance.

This recommendation is intended to encourage consideration of pain relief as part of routine veterinary and livestock management decisions. It does not prescribe specific medicines or treatment protocols, which should remain under veterinary direction where appropriate. Instead, it aims to promote awareness of pain management, support continual improvement in animal welfare and reflect the growing body of scientific evidence demonstrating the benefits of appropriate analgesia. By encouraging producers to consider pain relief whenever animals experience painful procedures or conditions, the recommendation supports Red Tractor's objective of promoting high standards of animal health, welfare and responsible stockmanship.

Suggested References

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