Tendon Troubles In Newborn Calves Require Quick Attention

MT. VERNON, MO.

Every now and then calves are born with a condition called contracted tendons. It results in the calf not being able to straighten out its front pasterns so they can put their hooves flat on the ground.

"Calves that have this end up walking with the hooves turned back. Some people refer to this also as knuckling," said Eldon Cole, a livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

The problem surfaces out of the clear and seems to affect a few calves then it disappears.

"I've read about it and visited with veterinarians. The conclusion is nutrition, intrauterine positioning and genetics may all play a role," said Cole.

The minerals that may be involved are manganese and selenium. Vitamin D and E also play a part in muscle and tendon growth in the infantile calf.

Certain plants (I lupine, locoweed and poison vetch), if eaten by the pregnant female at just the right point in gestation may contribute to the problem.

Autosomal recessive genes have been known to cause musculoskeletal defects in infant calves.

"If the problem occurs in the herd, you might do a pedigree check to see if the sire and dam are closely related," said Cole.

The most often mentioned theory revolves around insufficient room in the uterus for extension and growth of the tendons.

"This seems logical to me if the affected calf is big, and a bull calf which it seems often is the case," said Cole.

The affected calf normally straightens out after hobbling around several days. It's important in the first few days to make sure the calf nurses so keeping the cow and calf in a smaller area is advised.

"I've heard lots of home remedies such as massaging the pastern area, using splints or casts and these may speed recovery. Others will just leave them alone and they also straighten out," said Cole. "Unfortunately, this condition does not have a well-defined cause or solution that I've been able to find." Δ