

Unit 13: Abortion in cattle and sheep

Factsheet

Introduction

The length of gestation in cattle is 275 days and in sheep it is 147 days. A few days either side of these is acceptable.

If early death of the foetus occurs inside the mother, then it is likely that the tiny foetus will be reabsorbed into the uterus lining leaving no trace.

However, if the foetus is expelled from the uterus before full term, then this is called an abortion.

Causes of abortion in cattle and sheep

They can be classified in the following way:

1. **Pathogenic** - caused by disease causing organisms
2. **Situational** - caused by a set of circumstances

1. Pathogenic causes

These abortion pathogens are infectious and are either specific or non-specific:

- Salmonellosis (particularly *salmonella dublin*)
- Listeriosis
- Leptospirosis
- *Neospora caninum* abortion
- Bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD)
- Infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR)
- Campylobacteriosis
- Fungal/mycotic abortion
- Epizootic/chlamydial abortion
- Trichomoniasis
- Brucellosis

2. Situational causes

These abortions are caused by a variety of situations:

- Drug-induced (prostaglandins) given by a vet
- Insemination, thinking the female was not pregnant
- Trauma/stress
- High fever and endotoxins
- Nutritional
- Genetic (malformation)

Methods of control and prevention

- Good husbandry
- Correct feeding
- Good management with excellent record-keeping
- Good biosecurity with screening of new animals and quarantine facilities
- Early identification of the cause and therefore prevention of further cases
- Effective herd health planning to reduce incidences of abortion.