



Is copper a problem in your herd?

How can you tell if any or all of these cows are suffering from copper poisoning?



The table below shows the latest figures from 52 herds sampled by Westpoint vets across the UK between 2009 and 2010

Herd size	No. of herds	% of herds sampled with high copper*	% of cows tested		
			High	Normal	Low
< 100	6	66.67%	66.67%	33.33%	0%
100 - 200	12	58.33%	53.33%	24.27%	22.4%
200 - 300	24	45.83%	37.5%	41.5%	21%
301+	10	60%	65%	30%	5%

* When three out of five animals tested as very high copper levels

How can something so small tell you so much about the health of your herd?

Trace elements are minerals that are required in very small amounts in the body. This group includes copper, selenium, cobalt, manganese, zinc, iodine, iron and molybdenum. These minerals are involved with: growth, fertility, calf survival, foot and udder health, bone strength and immune function. Deficiencies (and toxicities) in the trace elements can have significant effects on animal health and production.

Do you know the trace element status of your animals? You may have an idea of the level included in the diet, but does this reflect their true internal status? There are many factors affecting the dietary absorption of these minerals. It's possible you may be under supplementing one mineral whilst over-supplementing another.

The best way to assess trace element status is by measuring levels in the animal. Blood tests are simple and effective for some but can be inaccurate for others, particularly copper. Adding liver biopsies alongside blood samples is probably the best way to accurately assess trace elements. Liver biopsies are the only way to accurately assess copper status.

Liver biopsy may sound a little scary but is actually a simple, low risk procedure. With good facilities the entire visit should take less than an hour. The sample is taken from the standing cow, with a small amount of local anaesthetic, surgical prep and a long biopsy needle. Cows generally tolerate the procedure well, and we normally sample five cows to get a decent cross-section of the herd. The result will enable us to determine how much copper reserve the cow has and allow us to make changes to the diet if necessary.

There is very little recent work done in the UK on liver levels of copper. Worryingly, many of the farms that Westpoint have tested recently across the country have revealed toxic levels of copper from long term over supplementation.

The other trace elements we are interested in for best production are selenium, cobalt, zinc and iodine. These can all be measured at the same time as liver biopsies are taken, with a blood sample from the same animals

Please feel free to contact us at the practice if you have any queries or are interested in getting your herd tested.



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