

2017

Facing up to facial eczema

Facial eczema remains a serious, recurring problem across many dairy farms. Cows are afflicted by a toxin found in the spores of a common pasture fungus.

A Facial Eczema Action Group, supported by SFF funding, is working to deliver improved prevention of the disease by providing evidence of the production cost and welfare implications for cattle when the disease is sub-clinical.

“Ultimately a better managed facial eczema programme will make a difference to the welfare, productivity and sustainability of national pastoral farming operations,” said project leader Emma Cuttance.

The disease proved especially prevalent in 2016, and in a warming

world, the signs are that it will not be disappearing anytime soon.

As part of the two-year project, Emma is especially keen to gather a body of knowledge that actively helps alleviate suffering from undiagnosed facial eczema.

“I honestly don’t know how the more badly affected animals keep going. This toxin completely ruins their livers. These animals on dairy farms must be stressed, maybe nauseous and most definitely depressed,” she says.

She’s also determined to keep debunking the many myths that surround the lethal disease.

“Some of our earlier SFF-funded work in this area helped dispel the idea that spreading lime on pasture would prevent it. I’m also concerned about

myths that zinc doesn’t work, and that rain washes away the spores.”

She supports prevention measures such as farmers taking out a microscope and monitoring eczema spore counts on their properties.

“Pasture spore counting is an effective way to keep up with spore count trends and understand the likely risk. Blood tests are another crucial tool.”

Emma is certain that better, more informed management of facial eczema can enhance pastoral farming.

“There are so many things that farmers can do here. We just have to get the message across.**”**

- EMMA CUTTANCE

