



CASTLE
VET GROUP

January/February NEWSLETTER!

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Welcome to our first newsletter of 2021,

We hope you had as good a Christmas and New Year as possible. It's the start of a New Year, finally! Let's hope that 2021 runs a little more smoothly than 2020!

In this newsletter, we have covered vaccination schedules and routine treatments. We discuss the importance of getting a robust schedule in place as well as a brief run-down of what should be on your schedule.

We've also taken a look at ewe nutrition and how getting it right can have far-reaching benefits on the wellbeing of your flock, and your bottom line.

We would like to hear from you about topics you would like us to cover in our newsletters for 2021 so, please feel free to give us any suggestions when we are on farm with you, or give us a call.

In the meantime, keep warm and stay safe.

Best wishes,

The team at Castle Vet Group

In this issue:



Vaccination Schedules & Routine Treatments

What are the benefits of a good vaccine and routine treatment schedule and how does it help on farm?



Ewe Nutrition

Making sure your ewes are getting the right food, especially in the 6 weeks before lambing season, is critical.

Vaccination Schedule & Routine Treatment



Continued 

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The types of vaccines used vary from farm to farm and whether the herd is predominantly dairy cow or suckler cattle. Routine veterinary treatments are also farm specific. This article will refer mainly to the beef suckler cow enterprises.

Reasons for Vaccinations and Routine Treatments:

- Reduced antimicrobial usage
- Easier to schedule and organise labour
- Prevents decrease in live weight gains of reduced milk production
- Reduces the risk of diseases spreading across the herd
- Prevents deaths and ensures a healthy herd
- Less stress on the animals since moving as a group
- Managed and planned costs which can be taken into account when planning cash flow
- Parasite control by routine treatments not only reduces the damage to parts of the animal, e.g. liver fluke but less build-up of parasite on the pasture

Caring for the needs of animals is a partnership between vet and farmer that benefits the farmer, the animal and the consumer.

Fewer injections with antibiotics equate to a lower risk of muscle damage, less risk of antibiotics entering the food chain and healthier livestock means more of the carcass can be used. Vaccinations and routine treatments should be tailored to the farm and the herd. Regular discussions with your vet, to make sure you are giving the right treatments and the right vaccinations at the right time, is vital.

Two of the major causes of losses in beef suckler farming are calf scour and pneumonia. While indoors, the risk of disease is increased because the animals in the herd are in close contact with each other. Controlling the cattle housing to reduce the risk of these and other diseases is a priority. Many of the vaccination schedules or routine treatments are carried out prior to, or at, housing, while others are carried out at turnout.



Vaccinations

There are a vast array of vaccines now available for cattle. It isn't possible, in this article, to cover all the different types of farm animal vaccines and schedules. Each farm has different risk factors and aims of production. To make sure your herd is protected, it is useful to discuss with your vet what the risk factors are on your farm, what vaccines are available and how best to implement a disease prevention program for your herd.



Two of the major causes of losses in beef suckler farming are calf scour and pneumonia.

Calf pneumonia

There are many different bacteria and viruses which can cause calf pneumonia. For the spring calving suckler herd, the greatest risk of pneumonia is post weaning and at housing. The timing of weaning and housing is affected by the age of the calf and body condition score of the cow. Calving early in the spring allows calves to be weaned and vaccinated in advance of housing. All vaccines need a period of time between administering the product and antibodies developing. Other factors to consider is whether the vaccine requires one or two doses before full immunity is provided. The number of vaccines required can depend on the age of the calves being vaccinated.

Calf scour

Calf diarrhoea is a greater problem in housed cattle compared to those being born outside. Vaccination against some of the major causes of scour can be given in the period prior to calving, which causes the dam to produce antibodies. These antibodies, provided in the colostrum, help protect the calf from developing disease. The timing of vaccination of the dam will depend on when cows or heifers will be expected to calve and the type of vaccine being used. It is good practice to have the herd pregnancy diagnosed.

For the scour vaccine to be effective the calf needs to absorb sufficient antibodies from the colostrum. The general guide is that the calf should receive 10% of bodyweight as colostrum within six hours of birth. In subsequent days, although the antibodies are not being absorbed, there is still some protection to the gut against pathogens such as E.coli K99, Rotavirus and Coronavirus.

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Routine Treatments

Routine treatments using antimicrobials are now discouraged for farm animals and this includes watery mouth in lambs. The majority of routine treatments that are now given are for parasites. The three major parasites for cattle are roundworm, lungworm and liver fluke.

Lungworm

A vaccination to prevent lungworm is available. For this to be effective, the first dose should be given 6 weeks prior to turnout and the second dose 4 weeks later. Calves that have been vaccinated for lungworm still require routine treatments or monitoring for roundworms. Alternatively routine use of anthelmintics can be used to control bovine lungworms (*Dictyocaulus viviparus*).

Roundworm - Parasitic Gastroenteritis (PGE)

During the summer months, monitoring for roundworm can be done using faecal egg counts. This is more cost effective if ten samples are taken and a single pooled test is carried out. Monitoring growth rates can also be done using weigh scales to get an indication if parasites could be reducing growth rates.

Hypobiosis of *Ostertagia*

Ostertagia can occur during the winter months when L4 stage larvae remain dormant in the gastric glands. As they are not mature parasites, no eggs are being produced and faecal worm egg counts can give false negative results at this time. The danger is that when all these L4 mature gradually or in burst during the spring, it can result in major damage to the intestines, diarrhoea and an ill thriven animal. Many farmers will worm cattle that have grazed for the first time at housing.

Liver Fluke

Another parasite which can cause ill thrift in cattle is liver fluke (*Fasciola hepatica*). This parasite has a complex

life cycle which involves an intermediate host of the mud snail.

Snails feed on algae that float on the top of the mud or slow moving water with a neutral pH. This life cycle means that liver fluke is more of a problem in certain areas of the United Kingdom and less common in others. On some farms, it is possible to fence off all wet areas or areas of slow moving water.

With routine treatments for liver fluke there is a concern about a resistance to triclabendazole developing. This flukicide can treat down to the 2 week stage for sheep and cattle. Use of triclabendazole should be reserved for acute liver fluke in areas where resistance has not developed. Other flukicides are more effective for liver fluke aged greater than 7 weeks. Therefore, for housed cattle it is often better to wait until at least 7 weeks after housing before treatment. In areas where there is a heavy fluke burden, treatment should be given at housing to prevent liver damage and then again after seven weeks.

There are only a few flukicides which are licensed for use in dairy cattle. Please give us a call for further information on the use of flukicides in dairy herds.

Cattle infected with *F. hepatica* are thought to be more susceptible to other infections, including *Salmonella* Dublin and *Clostridium* spp. There are no vaccines available for liver fluke, but there are for *Salmonella* and *Clostridial* diseases.

The use of routine treatments and vaccinations requires an integrated approach. Local veterinary knowledge combined with farm knowledge can help in developing ongoing herd health planning.

Give us a call to help you keep your herd healthy.

Well Fed Ewes Essential



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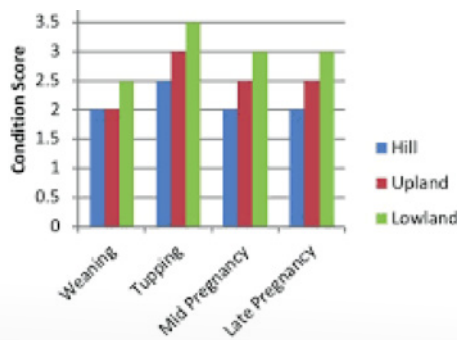
The 6 weeks in the lead up to lambing are some of the most critical for the ewe. This is when the lambs are undergoing their main period of growth, with up to 70% of lamb development happening.

Colostrum is also being manufactured and the ewe is most at risk of a serious energy deficit if not fed and managed carefully. Forage analysis can be used to help gauge exactly what you might be feeding and, just as importantly, what you may need to supplement with.

When deciding how to supplement the silage or forages, remember cereals (wheat in particular) are an excellent source of energy but, at high levels (over 0.5kg/head/day) they will depress forage intakes and reduce its digestibility (ruminal acidosis). When cereals are fed as straights, they can be fed whole with hay but, should be lightly processed if fed with silage.

By having the ewes scanned and undertaking body condition scoring (BCS) you have the chance to group them according to their likely energy demands, both in terms of how many foetuses they are carrying and current BCS. This gives you the opportunity to make sure you are feeding the flock efficiently and for optimum productivity.

Body condition scoring of sheep is a quick and easy management tool to assess the body reserves of sheep throughout the year. By physical, rather than visual, examination the variables of fleece cover, genetics and frame size is removed. A unit of body condition score equates to about 12% of an adult sheep's liveweight. Therefore, a 70kg ewe would need to lose or gain 8.4kg to move one condition score. The targets for sheep BCS vary throughout the management calendar.



It is well worth remembering that cases of pregnancy toxemia (twin lamb disease) are not the only price we could pay for under feeding our ewes it does result in higher lamb mortality. This is due to a number of factors:

1. Lambs from undernourished ewes have less brown fat, leaving them more susceptible to hypothermia (low body temperature) and hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) following birth.
2. Colostrum is also likely to be poorer, both in terms of quantity and quality, so lambs do not receive enough protective immunity.
3. Udder development also takes place during late pregnancy, so there is a knock-on effect on milk yield following lambing, which could have detrimental effects on lamb growth rates.

Anything affecting these areas will be seriously eating into profit margins. It is worth remembering that getting ewe condition and feeding right will have far reaching benefits.

We can help investigate how well ewes are doing on their pre lambing rations by taking some blood samples from 5 ewes from each different management group (triplet, twins, and single carriers) 3-4 weeks pre-lambing. This is the optimum time to see how she is coping on the diet and allows enough time to make some changes if necessary and avoid the other problems associated with negative energy balance, such as poor colostrum production.

Sheep in negative energy balance may develop pregnancy toxemia. Sadly, the treatment of pregnancy toxemia is often unsuccessful (only 33% survival in one study) so prevention is preferable to cure.

It is not just the energy levels that are important; correct protein feeding in late pregnancy is also crucial and blood testing monitors both long term protein status and the more immediate question of rumen degradable protein (RDP) which can be deficient in housed sheep due to straw or poor-quality hay-based diets. RDP has a significant effect on colostrum and milk production and, therefore, lamb health and growth rate. Bypass protein is also important and, in some trials, increasing protein supplementation by 20% resulted in heavier lambs at birth, around 30% increase in milk production and almost 90% reduction in worm egg output.

What changes could be made to maximise feed and energy intakes?

- If ewes are receiving compound feed and forage supplementation whilst still at pasture allowing ewes access to the same feeds and feeding style before moving will create a smoother transition
- Doing this in combination with moving ewes no later than 3 weeks pre-lambing means ewes should not experience an intake slump or excess stress whilst adapting to indoor feeding during the last few critical weeks of pregnancy
- Ensuring the stocking density of the shed is correct, and the availability of forage feed, will also minimise stress and increase intakes
- There should be a minimum of 15cm trough space per ewe. Consider if there is enough accessible feed space for all ewes to feed at the same time. Lying space is also important – a 70kg heavy in lamb ewe requires 1.3m². This space allowance will dictate the stocking density of a shed and therefore feed space requirements

If you have any questions about ewe nutrition or want us to check how your ewes are doing on their pre-lambing rations, give us a call.