

Newsletter

Spring 2024



Introduction

With the current weather we are finding it hard to believe that Spring is just around the corner. Turnout is eagerly anticipated by farmers everywhere, and even the cattle themselves seem to sense the impending release from their winter quarters with excitement, but this year it could be different... an unseasonably warm and wet winter which has affected the fields and grass drastically, but it will also affect the diseases we see this Spring. Preventative measures such as Faecal egg counts and vaccination are arguably going to be more important than ever. So don't forget to get your vaccine orders in early to get your animals protected and avoid disappointment! Brighter times are ahead, Heathfield show is not far away where we will of course have a stand with various baked goods and drinks! We also have plenty of talks and events in the planning so make sure you keep an eye on your emails!



Dates for your diary



**Small Holder Vaccine Day –
Lamb Heptavac P+ Day**
14th May 2024 & 11th June 2024



Youngstock Talk - TBC



Heathfield Show – 25th May 2024
Come and Say Hello at Our Stand!



AI in Suckler Herds - 30th May

Please call or email the office with any interest to our forthcoming events.

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Troubles at Turnout Time

With turnout, hopefully, just around the corner we should perhaps be familiarising ourselves again with the many risks associated with this time of year. These risks include Grass staggers (hypomagnesemia), blackleg, gut worms and lung worms, leptospirosis, scours caused by a low fibre, rich in young grass diet, and maybe also TB in cattle from ingestion of badger urine and faeces contaminated grazings. Preventative measures are taken each year to mitigate these risks and include the use of supplements, vaccines, wormers and equipment that prevents badgers sharing water or feed troughs at grass.

However, this Spring we have the real extra risk of Bluetongue (BTV3) to add to the above list. When the temperature consistently has risen to above 12oC the number of midges increases. This temperature increase is also required for the virus to multiply in a midge so that an infected midge becomes more

infectious. BTV is a midge borne disease and NOT transmitted from animal to animal.

Especially this year all cattle, sheep, camelid and goat owners must be vigilant for the symptoms of BTV 3 in their animals and report any suspect cases to APHA or maybe firstly discuss with one of our farm vets. The clinical signs are most obvious in sheep and include crusty erosions around the nostrils and on the muzzle, discharge and drooling from mouth and nose, reddening of skin above the hoof, lethargy and reluctance to move, and often a significant mortality rate. Cattle can show similar symptoms but often have no symptoms at all apart from lower productivity including milk yield and growth rate.

The BTV situation is rapidly changing and for the most up to date information please visit the Ruminant Health & Welfare website - www.ruminanthw.org.uk



Reducing Assisted Calvings and Dystocia

How many times have you had to use the calving jack this year? Have any calvings turned into a caesarean? The aim is to be assisting less than 5% of calvings.

Calving problems have been shown to reduce the calf's weaning weight and the dam's conception rate next season. Both are major hidden costs to a beef suckler system. The direct costs of a difficult calving include vet fees, labour cost and deaths of either calf or dam in the worst-case scenario.

Difficulty calving (dystocia) is caused by foetal oversize in most cases or secondly pelvic size of the dam.

Estimated Breeding Values (EBV) are the perfect way to select a bull that will produce calves of an appropriate size. There is direct and indirect calving ease to consider. Direct calving ease indicates how easily the calf will be born and indirect is an indicator of the daughter's calving ability. Therefore, indirect calving ease will be important when breeding replacements. Other relevant terminal EBV's include birthweight and gestation length. Negative values for birthweight and gestation length will produce calves that are lighter and not born overdue. Positive values for direct calving ease will lower the proportion of assisted calvings.

The bull only provides 50% of the genetics and so make sure to take dam characteristics into account as well.

Heifer selection is crucial for reducing future problems in the herd. The target age at first calving is 2 years old. By calving earlier, they will produce more calves and be retained in the herd longer. This improves the overall profitability of the herd. A pre-breeding assessment should be performed to check that heifers have reached 60% of adult weight when they go to the bull. The pre-breeding check can also include pelvic scoring and reproduction assessment performed by the vet. The pre-breeding check may give you the confidence to move age at first calving to 2 years without issues.

Pelvic scoring (pelvimetry) is an excellent way to find the extreme cases of pelvic size that you normally find at calving and even with a small sized calf results in a caesarean. This can be due to abnormal shaped pelvic processes that reduce the vertical space available. Pelvic scoring is performed by taking vertical and horizontal measurements within the pelvis. This volume is compared to the heifer's weight to calculate the size of calf she will be able to give birth to later in life. Pelvic size does not correlate to calf size so by selecting for larger pelvises will not select for larger calves. This trait is also highly heritable meaning that culling the outliers will quickly remove a problem from the herd.

Reproductive tract assessment can be performed by the vet using an ultrasound scanner to assess whether puberty has been reached. This is done by measuring the size of the uterine horns and looking at the structures on the ovaries. Heifer weight, pelvic score and uterine assessment combined will help you to best select heifers that will get in calf promptly and then calve without difficulty.

Pelvic scoring can easily be combined with your annual TB test, please enquire at the office for more information.





| Legalities of castration

Just a little reminder to our clients on the ins and outs of castrating your own animals.

The majority of you are ringing your animals yourself, which negates the need for surgical intervention as they grow. Ringing must be done before an animal reaches 7 days old. The reason for this legal cut-off point is the testicles must be small enough that they dry up and shrivel without cutting into any flesh. This minimises the pain they experience, and the risk of infection and tetanus.

It's important to check you have both testicles in the scrotum before and after the ring is placed. If you cannot get both down, do not castrate the animal and remove the ring carefully. Removing only one will leave scar tissue and make the job of removing the rig much more difficult!

Bloodless castration (Burdizzo castration) can be done on farm by farmers on calves 7 days to 2 months old and lambs 7 days to 3 months old. It's important to be well trained and competent in this before attempting, as the urethra can be mistaken for the spermatic cord, and it is impossible to know afterwards if the animal is successfully castrated. Again, do not use Burdizzo on animals with only one testicle.

Once a calf reaches 2 months old and a lamb 3 months old, it is a legal requirement that any castration must be carried out by a vet and that local anaesthetic is used. Please call us to get it booked when suits you.



| Don't forget your heifers!

For the autumn block calvers milk feeding is over, weaning is done, labour hours feeding is vastly reduced and, if the fields ever dry out, turnout is on the way. But all of this does not mean we can forget about the replacement heifers. Continuing to focus on the growth and health of our heifers will ensure that as many as possible are being served at 13 months and getting in calf, ready to join the milking herd at 24 months old. Additionally, top health in the early months of life will increase the chances of hitting the target of 90%+ of heifers making it into their second lactation (and beyond). Increasing the number of heifers reaching beyond their second lactation will increase profitability and sustainability of the herd and is a greater pay off for all the hard work from service of the dam, birth, and rearing the calf.

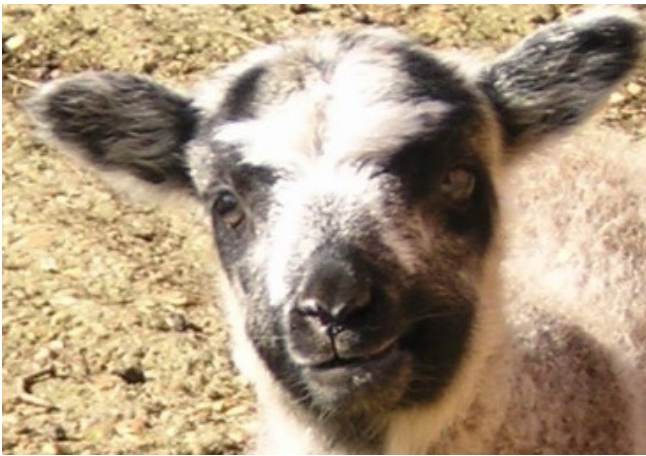
Weights should be taken at 9 months of age (or pre-turnout if this is more convenient) - being able to see if we are hitting targets of 40% of mature weight at 9 months of age will allow us to see that we are providing the right nutrition and environment for the heifers to continue to mature and grow ahead of services later in the year. Blood sampling the cohort for trace elements will allow us to make informed decisions on whether to supplement or bolus over the grazing season to guarantee that the heifers are in the best possible position for service and calving.

Furthermore, we can't forget out infectious diseases! 9 months+ is prime time to be sampling our unvaccinated heifers for a BVD screen - essential for many milk contracts as well the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway. Not forgetting to get in key vaccinations such as Huskvac or starting primary courses against Leptospirosis, BVD and IBR to get them in sync with the milking herd.

All in all - Spring is not the time to be forgetting our Dairy Heifers!

A little reminder of the importance of colostrum

Now we are coming into the main lambing and calving season, it is good to remind yourself of the importance of colostrum. As mentioned in our winter newsletter, monitoring body condition and feeding sufficient energy and protein to the ewe/cow maximises the production level and quality of colostrum. The correct amount of good quality colostrum given at the right time will enable the passive transfer of immunity to the neonate and protect against infectious agents in the environment. It will also provide vital energy which the neonate will need to keep warm. Getting colostrum right is key to giving the neonate the best start possible and in doing this should enable the animal to grow and deal with infectious challenges potentially without the need medical intervention. Below is a reminder of why colostrum is so important and a guide to feeding colostrum. #ColostrumIsGold.



What Colostrum Provides:

- 1. IMMUNOGLOBULINS (IgG).** Both ewe and cow colostrum contain an average of 50g/L of IgG at lambing and calving respectively. These IgG levels decline rapidly after lambing or calving so timing is critical, ensure the first feed is within 6 hours of birth, ideally within 2 hours.
 - By 24-36hour the lamb/calf is no longer able to absorb the IgG from the gut.
- 2. ENERGY:** colostrum is 15% fat
 - Brown fat laid down before birth diminishes after 5 hours and neonates require approximately 200ml/kg of colostrum in the first 24hours just to keep warm.
 - Appropriate feeding in late pregnancy ensures not only brown fat to be laid down in-utero but also ensures that the dam has enough good quality colostrum available.
- 3. LAXATIVE:** to help the lamb pass the meconium this bacteria causes severe septicaemia, as seen in this case, and is multi-drug resistant. A review of dry cow therapy technique was recommended.

When and How Much to Feed:

All neonates should receive 50mls/kg body weight as soon as possible after birth (ideally within 2hours).

- Approximately 200ml for a 4kg lamb
- Approximately 2L for a 40kg calf.

Within the first 24hours a total of 200ml/kg should be ingested, therefore it may not be sufficient to provide one feed at birth and assume this will do. If the lamb or calf is not drinking of its own accord, then feeding should be repeated 6-12hours later.



Powder Vs Natural Colostrum:

- Ewe/cow colostrum is far superior to all powdered alternatives (containing 50% more IgG on average) so where appropriate, colostrum can be collected and stored in the fridge for upto one week or in the freezer. (Ensure you gradually defrost to avoid damaging the IgG).
- When natural colostrum is not available, powdered substitutes should be used, but make sure you read the contents and ensure the IgG levels are above 20g/L. Please speak to a farm vet at Cliffe Vets to check the product before you buy if you are unsure. Please note; it is not always the expensive ones that are better..... read the small print!

Checking Colostrum Quality:

- You can use a colostrometer to check the IgG levels in natural colostrum, this is quick, easy and cheap.

Checking Passive Transfer:

- Bloods can be taken from lambs before 2 days old, and calves before 7 days old to check if passive transfer of IgG has been successful. Please ask a farm vet for more information on this.



Quarterly Disease Report - January to March 2024

Cattle

Liver fluke screening over the winter period revealed a mixed picture across several herds. Overall prevalence appears to be low but where herds have performed serial testing those which have tested positive have tested positive later in the year indicating that liver fluke infection occurred towards in the weeks immediately preceding housing. It is important to consider what stage of liver fluke is targeted by each flukicide product to avoid the need for double treatments as some products (closantel/albendazole) do not treat immature flukes.

Calf pneumonia remained a constant issue across several herds with many having increased mortality and reduced growth rates across store cattle during the housing period. In one such case a 6-week-old calf was found collapsed with heavy breathing and died despite treatment. Post-mortem examination revealed 90% of the available lung fields were consolidated leaving only a small proportion of functioning lung. Incidentally, the calf also had a ventricular septal defect (VSD whereby the blood from the left side of the heart flows into the right side of the heart (scalpel blade).



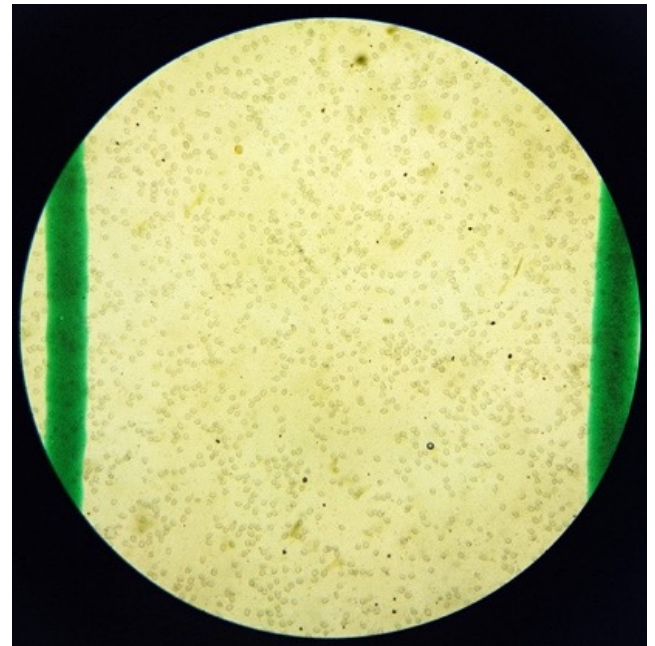
The group had received one injection of a pneumonia vaccine which highlights the importance of completing the full vaccine course prior to housing to offer the optimum protection and value for money.

Sheep

Several flocks reported poor scanning this winter and after excluding the more common causes (Toxoplasmosis, Border Disease and Enzootic) numerous flocks were found to have high titres to Schmallenberg virus. The virus is typically associated with birth defects however foetal reabsorption has been reported when ewes are infected in early pregnancy.

Haemonchus infection was confirmed in a ewe found dead after scanning. The animal has fluid in the abdomen and thorax because of low blood protein with a faecal worm egg count of 2550epg (ref <500epg) with no scour staining. The exceptionally mild winter may have allowed for prolonged survival and infectivity of Haemonchus on pasture. Several other flocks also reported high egg counts in mature ewes without overt scour indicating Haemonchus as the likely cause.

Coccidiosis was the cause of death in a 4-week-old lamb found dead with dark scour. The large intestine had severe haemorrhage and the egg count was approximately 600,000epg.





| Smallholder Meeting

On Thursday 8th March we held an evening lambing talk for our Smallholder clients with a good turnout and plenty of snacks and hot drinks provided! The talk covered managing sick ewes at lambing and neonatal diseases, ending with a practical for how to deal with different presentations using soft toys and dead lambs. This also involved learning how to use a lambing snare – a useful tool for head-back presentations allowing you to keep the head in position without taking up valuable space in the pelvis with your hand.

This spring we held Lambivac vaccination days for the first time for goats. This had limited uptake and we would love to know if more people would be interested next year. Please let us know if that's the case as we'd like to continue offering this service!

