

# Newsletter

## Summer 2023



Now how did it get to September already? While I write this the sun has finally shown its face again after a rather challenging summer. Hopefully most of you managed to get the harvest in and are now looking at some better conditions for the maize.

It was great to see lots of you at the Heathfield and South of England Shows, our very own Nick and Sandra had a face off in the Texel show ring and both walked away with rosettes. The monster trucks were a definite highlight for our junior vets.

We're saying 'See you soon' to Catherine o'Dell our ATT (Approved TB Tester) as she heads off on her Maternity Leave, so Good luck! And Welcome to Gemma Harris who will be joining our Cliffe Team in October as our New ATT. I'm sure you all will see her and give her a warm welcome.

With regards to TB, a reminder about the new rule that came into force on the 1st of August. Post-movement TB testing became compulsory for cattle moved to annual surveillance testing parts of the edge area (including East Sussex) from higher TB incidence areas of England and from Wales. APHA will initially send reminder letters for anyone buying affected stock however the post-movement is privately funded, and these letters will be phased out.

On the 26th of August it was very exciting to attend the first on farm Ram sale in the South East. Organised by James Hamilton and held at his beautiful farm in Hadlow Down. For sale were 26 Suffolks averaging over £1000 and a top price of £3500. Joining James' Suffolks were 25 Logie Durno's. Maybe not as known down here as up north but certainly up and coming, they too sold well at an average of just under £1000. The Scottish auctioneer kept the crowd entertained and within 50 minutes all the rams were sold. A very successful afternoon!

**We are looking forward to the local ploughing matches and off course the Dolphin Sheep Fair. It's always a nice time of the year to catch up with people in a friendly atmosphere!**



## Dates for your diary



**Ram Fertility Clinic - 20.09.23**



**AI Clinic Day - 04.10.23**



**Small Holder - Evening Talk 15.11.23**

Flock & Beef Club dates to be confirmed.

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

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## Urinary stones in goats

Bladder stones, also known as calculi or urolithiasis, is a condition most commonly seen in male castrated pygmy goats. Other factors putting your goats at risk include decreased water intake (which causes more concentrated urine leading to increased stone formation), and a high-grain diet (grains have high phosphorus levels which is the main mineral involved in stone formation). As mentioned above, pygmy goats are particularly prone due to the small size of their urethras (tube from the bladder to the outside) blocking easily. The males are much more at risk than the females as their urethras are much longer with a kink in, and early castration causes the urethra to not grow fully, leading again to an increased risk of urinary stones causing a blockage.

Signs your goat might be suffering from urolithiasis include:

- Restlessness
- Tail twitching
- Frequent straining to urinate without passing anything
- Occasionally rectal prolapse resulting from the straining
- Anxiety
- Excessive vocalisation

A blood test can check for urolithiasis if we suspect it to be a problem.

Without treatment, bladder rupture will occur within 24 to 48 hours. Only surgical intervention is possible at this point which has a low success rate. Treatment before this stage consists of catheterisation and supportive care. As with most things, prevention is better than cure. Low-grain diets are essential, with plenty of fresh water available. Ammonium chloride can also be used to acidify the urine which helps prevent stone formation.





## Low Stress Weaning of Spring-born Beef Calves

Do you dread weaning your calves in the autumn? Do you see cases of pneumonia at housing? There are ways to reduce stress at weaning which are proven to reduce the growth check and the incidence of pneumonia.

The traditional method of weaning is to separate the cows and calves and put them as far away from each other as possible at housing. This is a sudden stressful change that coincides with moving to housing and change of diet. No wonder there are more problems at this time.

### Diet

Feeding creep for 4-6 weeks before weaning, smooths the transition from grass and milk to forage and concentrates. Creep feed should be ad lib and continuously available to prevent gorging. Adding fibre like sugar beet pulp at the start will help reduce the risk of ruminal acidosis as the rumen adapts to the high starch content. A silage or hay bale can be put out in the field to get the calves eating forage before weaning as well.

Milk and grass are high in protein (26-28%) and so a growth check post-weaning can be caused if the new diet does not contain enough protein. Ensure that the concentrates fed to your calves after weaning contains at least 18% protein and good quality/ first-cut silage will help smooth the change. Weighing your housed calves routinely will help monitor this growth check.

### Management

Slow methods of weaning help get the calves and cows used to being separate. Quiet-weaning nose rings are easily placed and prevent suckling. This encourages the calves to be more independent and has been shown to improve live weight gain post-weaning compared to not using any.

Electric fencing can be used to creep-graze calves to help break the bond with the cow. This is done by creating an area of the field that the cows cannot access so that the calves graze independently. This is possible if the cows have been electric fence trained but the calves can pass freely underneath.

Weaning can also be done more traditionally by moving the calves into separate field that is adjacent so that the cows and calves can touch. This could be done either with very good fencing down the middle of a field or by a thick hedge with a gate that allows contact. Another benefit is the calves are kept in the same environment before housing to reduce the number of changes that occur at the same time. This method is more difficult as it requires very good fencing or thick hedges to prevent any escapes.

Avoid performing any management procedures at the same time as weaning for example dis-budding or castration as this will exacerbate the stress.

### Vaccination

Vaccinating the calves for pneumonia before weaning if you've had a problem before will protect them before weaning. This is important as the stress of weaning can reduce the efficacy of the vaccine but if that is not possible vaccinating at housing is better than not vaccinating at all.

## Youngstock Health Programme

On farm data has always been important, but is arguably becoming more so with the updates to milk contracts and use of technology on farm. Using data allows us to identify areas where you are performing well, and areas where we can make proactive changes to maximise efficiency. For our heifer replacements key areas to monitor include colostrum passive transfer, weight gains, treatment/disease records, mortality, age of first service and number of services. Monitoring these with accurate records will give a comprehensive overview of your management and performance, allowing you to identify your pinch points in production and make comparisons year on year. For example, seeing stunted growths following weaning may indicate that weaning practices need to be changed in the following rearing season. In making these changes we would hopefully see no dip in growth rates in the next year's records. This would therefore help us work towards bringing down the average age of first service to the target 13-15 months.

Collecting and processing data can be time consuming, therefore Cliffe are offering all of this as part of the Cliffe Youngstock Health Programme. The programme aims for us to come on farm to help collect data to monitor all the key aspects of heifer rearing and provide a meaningful bespoke report to allow you to make beneficial changes on farm.

**If you would like to join or for more information please call the office on 01273 473232.**







## Quarterly Disease Report - April-August 2023

### Cattle

A 3-month-old suckler calf was found dead after being disbudded 2 days earlier. Disbudding was uneventful and the calf walked out of the crush normally.

Post-mortem examination revealed a large area of haemorrhage and necrosis below the left horn bud with localised meningitis of the left temporal lobe of the brain. E.coli was recovered in heavy growth from a swab. The brain was sent to APHA Starcross for histopathology.

Histopathology revealed the cause to be Clostridial encephalitis (Blackleg of the brain) and is the first case recorded in the UK. It is likely that the bacterial spores were present in the brain tissue and localised tissue damage caused by the disbudding created an environment favourable for bacterial growth. Vaccination using Bravoxin 10 was advised.



An aged dairy cow required calving assistance and a dead premature foetus was delivered vaginally. The cow was hypothermic (36.5C) with severely sunken eyes and muffled heart sounds. She was treated with antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and rehydrated with an oral electrolyte solution but was found dead 2 hours later. Post-mortem examination found a marked increase in abdominal fluid with inflammation of the omentum and the rumen was adhered to the diaphragm. Septic peritonitis was the cause of death and a wire was suspected as the inciting cause due to the location of the rumen adhesions to the diaphragm.



Two ewes and two rams from two different farms were found dead unexpectedly or had lost condition and developed a bottle jaw. Physical examination of two animals prior to death revealed significant heart murmurs. Post-mortem examination showed an infection of the heart valve (endocarditis) with subsequent heart failure. Recent injections, recent dipping, ticks and lameness in the flock are all risk factors for the development of disease. In one flock lameness was identified as a potential predisposing factor.



## Johnes Disease in cattle

### Did you know that?

1. A Johnes positive cow is 2 x more likely to get mastitis and become a high cell count cow.
2. A Johnes positive cow is 5 x more likely to go lame.
3. Other grazing mammals can be Johnes positive including Sheep, Deer and Rabbits.
4. The bacteria that cause Johnes disease can survive for 12 months in water, in slurry and on pasture.
5. Calves up to 12 months old can be experimentally infected with a low dose of Johnes bacteria.
6. Adult infection is only rarely possible in high prevalence herds.
7. Calf to calf transmission is possible if high dose of infection is present.
8. The best way to introduce Johnes in your herd is from buying in cattle.
9. The best way to spread Johnes in your herd is to have an overstocked straw bedded dirty calving yard.
10. The best way to detect Johnes in your herd is by serial testing of milk or blood samples.



## | Haemonchus contortus; the Barber's Pole worm

Over the summer months many of our clients do regular faecal worm egg counts for their sheep flocks and this is a great tool for monitoring worm burdens, enabling quick treatment when necessary. In the last year or so we have seen more *Haemonchus contortus*. This worm lives in the abomasum of sheep and goats and feeds on blood. Animals acquire infection by ingesting L3 (Larvae) from the pasture where it benefits from warm and moist conditions to survive and develop.

- **Acute infection** causes severe anaemia and sudden death. It does not cause scours.
- **Sub-acute infection** causes submandibular oedema (bottle jaw) and loss of condition.
- **Chronic infection** causes general ill thrift, lethargy, weakness, bottle-jaw and failure to thrive.

Each female *Haemonchus* produces thousands of eggs and therefore sheep that are infected can have extremely high faecal worm egg counts (FWECs), for example 20,000-30,000 egg.



Photo 1: Female *Haemonchus* worm with eggs inside it.

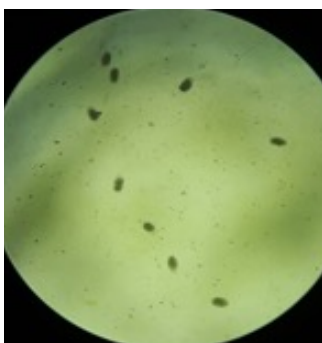


Photo 2: Trichostrongyle eggs  
Each female can shed between 5000-15,000 eggs per day.

**Diagnosis:** usually made by post-mortem findings and very high FWECs combined with clinical signs. However, it is worth noting that very high FWECs are not always due to *Haemonchus* alone and there are often mixed infections. Diagnosis can be confirmed with differential staining of Trichostrongyle-type eggs, carried out by the APHA.

*Haemonchus* used to only be seen occasionally in the autumn months, primarily in southern England. It can now be seen throughout the year in most parts of the UK, with the peak time for infection from July to November (Carson et al, 2023). But the risk for *Haemonchus* remains sporadic, with climatic conditions combining with pasture contamination to produce a high level of challenge. Be on the look out!

Regular FWECs, monitoring parasite forecasts and examination of the flock for signs of anaemia is key to diagnosing this parasite early to enable prompt targeted treatment before there has been significant production losses.

**Treatment:** *Haemonchus* can be treated with any of the broad spectrum anthelmintics but speak to your vet prior to treatment, and ideally perform a drench check to ensure the treatment has been effective to monitor the presence of possible resistance. Remember to always worm with the SCOPS principles in mind.

*References: Carson et al, 2023: 'Haemonchus contortus: an overview.' Veterinary Record. Volume 192 Issue 1.*







## Maximise your flock genetics

We have been performing Artificial Insemination (AI) for ewes now for 6 years and have offered Embryo Transfer (ET) for 3 years.

The majority of our ET and AI clients own pedigree breeding flocks. The benefits of using AI to amplify male genetics and ET to amplify female genetics is clear in this situation.

The process of ET involves programming donor ewes to super-ovulate them, followed by AI once or twice. They are then flushed six days later to retrieve the embryos before implanting them into recipient ewes who have been programmed to the same stage in the reproductive cycle. The yield of a single flush is highly variable due to a lot of factors, including timing of AI and semen quality, but can range between 0 and 30 implantable embryos. The average across all breeds is approximately 7-8 embryos implanted per flush, and subsequent conception rates of recipient ewes are usually over 80%. In addition, we are also able to freeze and store embryos for future use or implant purchased frozen embryos into your own recipient ewes.

The use of AI in some commercial situations should also not be overlooked. Some commercial clients are now able to share more valuable higher performing rams especially for tight synchronised lambing situations.

Ram to ewe ratios for synchronised flocks should be as low as 1:10 for optimum conception rates. Due to the high number of rams needed, the "ram cost" per lamb born is high. The number of lambs born to one sire could therefore be only 17 lambs per year (assuming 170% turned-out). A good £650 ram will therefore cost £10 per lamb born over a four year period when ewes have been sponged for synchronisation.

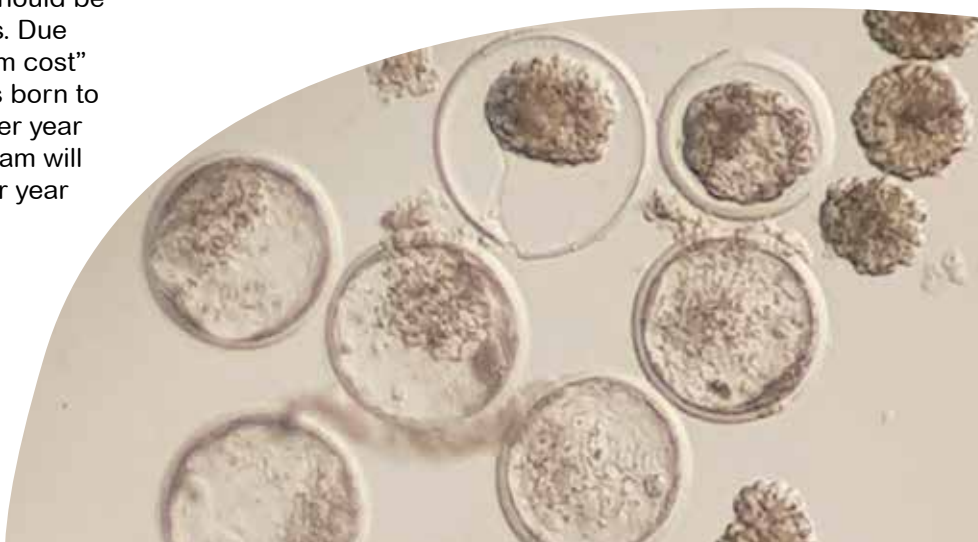
However, the same £650 ram used for fresh semen collection and AI could be used to inseminate up to 60-70 ewes on one day. We can provide this service on farm. This reduces the ram cost over the same period to £1.37 per lamb. The AI cost of inseminating large numbers of ewes is about £8 per lamb turned-out, so it is possible to see that even taking AI costs into consideration it is comparable to natural service in terms of cost, plus the extra benefit and cost savings of a tighter lambing period.

In addition, some farmers may opt to club together to buy and share higher genetic merit rams whilst maintaining their own biosecurity. Sharing the purchase cost of an AI ram with a neighbour then means that the ram cost is halved again, as long as they are happy to lamb on different weeks!

If you wish to know more about our advanced breeding services in sheep, please contact the practice. We would be very happy to answer any questions.

### Our Services:

- Artificial Insemination
- Flushing and Embryo Transfer
- Embryo Implantation
- Embryo Flush and Freeze
- Semen Collection and Freezing
- Ram semen testing
- Ram Vasectomies



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