



July/August NEWSLETTER!

01786 430387

forthvalleyvets.co.uk

Welcome to your July/August newsletter,

Autumn is just around the corner, quickly followed by winter. These two seasons may provide picture-perfect views on farm but also bring with them their own trials and tribulations for farmers.

With that in mind, we have taken a look at lameness in sheep to bring you the lowdown, along with the five point plan.

We've also covered BVD and the cost of infection. This highly contagious disease costs the beef and dairy industries over £33 million a year.

We would love to hear from you about what subjects you think would be useful for us to cover in the newsletter, so let us know when we are on farm next.

Stay safe!

Best wishes

The team at Forth Valley Vets

In this issue:



The lowdown on lameness in sheep

Lameness in sheep impacts welfare, productivity and fertility. What can be done to combat it?



BVD and the cost of infection

Take a look at how you can make sure it doesn't affect your animals and your bottom line

The lowdown on lameness in sheep

Continued



Lameness is one of the most widespread problems facing the UK sheep flock. An estimated 3 million sheep, at any given time are lame, costing the sheep industry in excess of £24 million every year. Lameness impacts on productivity, fertility and farmers' pockets.

What causes lameness?

Wetter summers and milder winters provide perfect conditions for the bacterium that cause lameness to thrive. The most common diseases are Footrot and Scald. Scald is responsible for 90% of lameness in the UK and develops into Footrot in some cases.

Scald (Interdigital Dermatitis)

This disease is caused by *Fusobacterium necrophorum*, found naturally in the environment. It affects the skin between the claws and is spread in warm, wet grazing conditions. Although any age group can be affected, it is more commonly seen in lambs grazing in long, wet grass and ewes housed on damp straw.

Trauma to the skin between the claws, such as damage caused by abrasive plants like thistles, allows the bacterium to attack the damaged skin. Signs of the disease are inflamed, moist, swollen skin covered by a thin, white layer of scum. Scald can create the perfect conditions for Footrot to take hold.

Treatment

Give us a call to discuss the best treatment options for you and your flock. They will include:

- Topical antibiotic spray
- Foot bathing following an outbreak and regularly during warm, wet weather
- Five Point Plan

Footrot

This is an extremely painful disease caused by *Dichelobacter nodosus* and *Fusobacterium necrophorum*. It is highly contagious and sheep with Footrot are very lame and struggle to bear weight on the affected limbs. Sheep that are affected in both front legs will walk and graze on their knees, causing further issues with their legs. The interdigital skin is moist and swells with the infection spreading to the horn and deeper tissues, sometimes spreading along the sole and up the wall of the hoof. There is also a foul smell with oozing discharge. In extreme cases it can cause the horn to separate and may result in the loss of the hoof.

Footrot is common in warm (10°C or over), damp conditions, peaking between April to June and August to October. Because of the highly contagious nature of Footrot, it should be considered a whole flock problem.

Treatment

Talk to us for advice but treatment may include:

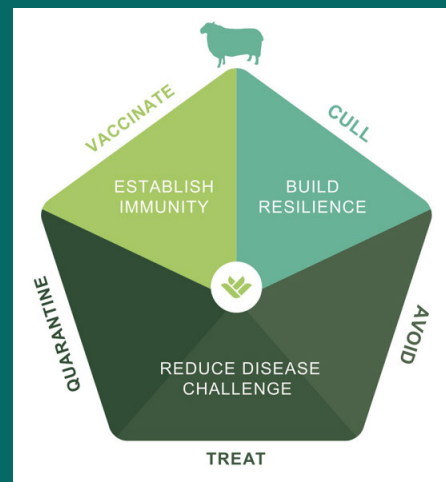
- Separation of affected sheep for treatment
- Topical antibiotic spray
- In severe cases, antibiotic injections
- Foot bathing
- Selective culling of any sheep that don't improve with treatment
- Vaccination programme for future control
- Five Point Plan

The bacteria that causes this disease can only survive in the environment for up to 12 days under perfect conditions so, rotational grazing and making sure the affected animals are isolated can help with control.

Five Point Plan

For lameness control, the Five Point Plan should be implemented. (The Five Point Plan is a useful plan for any contagious disease.)

1. Cull – badly or repeatedly infected animals
2. Quarantine – any incoming animals
3. Treat – any cases quickly and efficiently
4. Avoid – spreading at handling and gathering
5. Vaccinate – talk to your vet about vaccines available to prevent further outbreaks



Other diseases that cause lameness

Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis (CODD)

Signs:

- Small ulcers start to form on the coronary band of the horn and then rapidly moves down the claw
- There is quite often some hair loss above the coronary band and the entire horn may detach
- The tissue will have a grey, scum-like appearance with no significant smell

Treatment:

- It is extremely important not to trim the horn. Although loose, it still protects what is underneath
- Because antibiotics don't always work, it is important to speak to your vet to find out the best course of action
- It may be necessary to cull severely affected animals

Soil Balling

Signs:

- Hard lumps of soil, mud, faeces or bedding material causing irritation between the claws
- If left untreated, this could lead to other infections

Treatment:

- Use a footbath to soften the lumps
- Remove the lumps by hand and spray with an antibiotic spray if there is raw skin to prevent any further infection

Continued ➔

Shelly Hoof

Signs:

- Horn separates from the wall forming an air pocket which can become filled with dirt and stones etc. It can progress into White Line disease
- In many cases, sheep will show no signs of lameness which emphasises the importance of checking your flock

Treatment:

- Carefully trim the horn, removing the loose part and treat with antibiotic spray if there is any infection
- If there is no infection, it may be sensible to fill the air pocket with hoof putty

Toe Abscess (White Line)

Signs:

- Sheep will suddenly become very lame
- The hoof with the abscess will be swollen and possibly hot to touch
- If the abscess is severe, pus can burst out at the top of the hoof or along the heel
- The pus will have a strong smell



Treatment:

- Careful trimming to drain the abscess and release pressure but, don't trim if the abscess has already burst
- Treat with an antibiotic injection, followed with spray once the pus is draining
- The pus being drained usually makes the sheep more comfortable and they generally recover after that. However, it can take up to six weeks for the horn to grow back
- If a permanent horn defect occurs, the sheep can be persistently affected. Speak to your vet if this is the case

Toe Granuloma (Strawberry)

Signs:

- A growth, similar to a strawberry in shape and colour, develops. This is usually around the toe
- The 'strawberry' bleeds when it is touched and the condition is very painful. The sheep may be reluctant to bear weight on the affected foot

Treatment:

- Anti-inflammatory drugs can help control the pain. Talk to your vet about which drugs suit best
- This is a condition that doesn't heal very often so, culling should be considered
- Don't attempt to remove the 'strawberry'. It could result in heavy bleeding and it is likely to grow back again

Pedal Joint Infection

Signs:

- A badly swollen claw that is extremely painful with pus bursting out of the hoof in several places
- This is a disease that is common in fat, particularly in big rams

Treatment:

- Caught early enough, antibiotics can be successful, but if not caught, the joint will be permanently damaged
- Speak to your vet as amputation may be necessary
- Even after amputation, the animal may not fully recover so culling may be a better option

General tips on footcare

- It is impossible to protect your flock from lameness completely, but it can be controlled with regular inspection and good foot care
- Routine trimming of the feet isn't necessary and can cause more trouble than it saves
- Call us for correct diagnosis and early treatment if you notice any lameness
- Record or mark the treated animal and the affected limb so, if lameness persists you can repeat the treatment after two weeks. If a third treatment is needed, it may be necessary to cull the animal
- Clean and disinfect equipment regularly to prevent the spread

If you have any concerns about lameness, give us a call.



BVD and The Cost Of Infection

Continued ➔

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) is a highly contagious disease that costs the beef and dairy industries in excess of £33 million a year, but what is it and how can you make sure it doesn't affect your animals or your bottom line?

What is BVD?

The virus itself is a pestivirus that is closely related to Border disease in sheep and Classical Swine fever in pigs. How BVD affects the herd varies. Adults show signs of fever, lethargy, decreased milk production and diarrhoea. Foetal infection in utero can lead to abortions, congenitally deformed calves that are weak and sometimes die, to persistently infected (PI) animals.

Due to the immunosuppressant nature of the disease, infected animals are more susceptible to other diseases like pneumonia and scour and links have been made to an increase in cases of TB in an infected herd.

The biggest issue is the impact BVD has on reproduction. Infertility, foetal absorption, mummification of the foetus, congenital defects of the eyes and nervous system and weak and premature calves are all markers of BVD. The virus is perpetuated within the herd by animals that are Persistently Infected (PI) with BVD.



PIs

If cows or heifers become infected within the first 120 days of pregnancy, and she doesn't abort the calf, it can be born with the disease and will be a Persistently Infected animal. If the dam becomes infected early in the gestation period (before day 110) the underdeveloped immune system of the unborn calf doesn't recognise the virus as foreign. The animal incorporates it into its immune system and sheds the virus for life.

Once born, these calves often show no signs of the disease but become super-shedders. They shed millions of virus particles in their skin, saliva, urine and faeces which then spreads rapidly throughout the herd. A single PI in a calf pen can spread disease to the rest of the herd.

The damage a PI can cause could end up costing farmers a fortune in infertility issues, high abortion rates, loss of productivity, outbreaks of scour and pneumonia.

Some of the PI youngsters can develop Mucosal Disease, resulting in fevers, ulceration of the nose, mouth and feet, severe diarrhoea and eventually death. Some PI animals go on to become breeding cows but will always give birth to a PI calf perpetuating infection in a herd.

How is it Spread?

If you already have a PI in your herd, the virus can be spread by nose-to-nose contact, saliva, urine, faeces etc. The disease is maintained within a herd by a PI. There are tests available that can help identify a PI or an infected animal. Speak to us about arranging these tests.

Bought-in animals are also one of the biggest risks. They can be PIs or simply infected, causing the disease to spread within your existing herd. Speak to us about isolating and testing these animals before introducing them.

Contact with neighbouring cattle across fences is a biosecurity risk, as well as contact through markets and a shared or hired bull. An infected bull can spread the disease through its semen. In the German eradication programme, it was found that visitors to farms were spreading the disease from farm to farm, highlighting the importance of washing and disinfecting facilities for visitors.

Control

A committed vet and farmer make a formidable team in the fight to eradicate BVD. The ADAM acronym sets out the four steps that will help you achieve a BVD free status.

A – Assess

Assess your herd for PIs and disease risk, including the environment your herd is kept in, neighbouring cattle etc., anywhere that your cattle could come into contact with the disease.

D – Define

Define the status of your herd with testing.

A – Action

Create and implement an action plan for the control of BVD on your farm.

M – Monitor

Monitor your herd, revisit steps 1 and 2 regularly to ensure your cattle stay BVD free.

The lynch pin to control is making sure you identify and cull any PIs in your herd and then follow up with testing replacement animals and vaccination for the remaining animals. We can help you identify the PIs and can advise on various vaccine options.

Other European countries have implemented control and eradication schemes, with quite a bit more success than the UK. Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark are now virtually BVD free.

There is also a voluntary, industry-led initiative to help eradicate BVD from England by 2022. The scheme offers a database of BVD free farms and individual animals, information on BVD control and the latest news. Take a look at the website bvdfree.org.uk

Scotland, Eire and Northern Ireland have mandatory, government-led initiatives in place. In some cases, it has meant animals from these areas have commanded a premium when sold because they can demonstrate they are BVD free. Wales has an industry-led voluntary scheme that can help farmers identify PIs using funds from the Welsh Government's Rural Development Programme. Gwaredu BVD funds annual testing of all cattle herds in Wales including PI Hunts.

Getting BVD under control and eradicating is important for any farm, whether they are disease free or not. Even if a herd is uninfected, it needs protection, as introduction of BVD into a herd that has not been previously exposed could be disastrous for herd health as well as financially for the farm. There is some good news though. As more herds become clear of infection, the risks of infection reduce.

If you have any concerns, give us a call.