

Welcome to your May-June newsletter,

Can you believe we are halfway through the year already?

Animal welfare has always been top of the agenda for farmers and vets so, in this issue, we take a closer look at how it goes hand in hand with a productive farm.

We've also got something a little different for you. With many farmers adding more exotic livestock to their farms, we thought you might be interested in a blood donation drive for alpacas that one of our colleagues held recently.

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 The Kingston Veterinary Group

In this issue:



Animal Welfare on a productive farm

The UK has some of the highest requirements set out in law. Take a closer look at what we can do to improve animal welfare on farm further.



Alpaca blood donation drive

Fay Pooley, Advanced Practitioner in Camelid Practice tells us how a recent blood drive went and why donation days like this are important.

Animal Welfare on a productive farm



Animal welfare has always been a priority for vets and farmers. Looking after animals is, after all, our job! In recent years however, animal welfare has become a buzzword which consumers and the public at large have taken a great deal of interest in. The media and social media have been in a position to provide a great deal of information and, unfortunately in many cases, misinformation on the subject. As farmers and farm vets there is an onus on us to be the voice of reason to our consumers, to highlight the high standards we set, to continue to improve where improvements are needed, and to speak out against situations where animal welfare is compromised.

The UK has some of the highest requirements of animal welfare set out in law in the world, and as we all know, the vast majority of farmers actually operate at a standard well above the legal baseline. As vets, we are often asked what people can do to ensure they are buying animal products responsibly from a good source, whether they should be buying organic, free range etc. We always give the response that, the single, easiest way people can do this is to buy British. We can obviously discuss the relative merits of our various production systems in this country, but as a first step, simply ensuring that it is British sets it at a pretty high standard!

What can we do to improve further? Improving animal welfare almost always goes hand in hand with improving a farm's productivity and profitability. Happy, healthy animals are productive animals. Below are a few examples of situations which spring to mind where small changes and improvements can be beneficial to both animal welfare and the farm business.

Calving and lambing

Parturition is inevitably a process which can cause pain and stress for both mother and baby. However, there are many things we can do to reduce this and control it when it does occur.

Good selection of genetics, such as easy calving bulls or lambing tups will reduce the number of oversized or mal presented young. The same is true when selecting breeding females with roomy pelvises. In cattle, pelvic scoring heifers is a relatively cheap and simple tool, which can help you to do this.

It is a really good idea to have a calving or lambing plan in place for your farm and we can help you with this. The plan will help you to decide when and how to intervene, make sure all the necessary equipment is ready and working, and decide how best to manage the mother and baby in the hours immediately after birth. A lot of research has been done recently, looking at improving survivability in neonatal animals and reducing disease in the mother. Small tricks like using anti-inflammatory drugs, bicarbonate, calcium and other medications under the appropriate circumstances will make a big difference.



Castrating and dehorning

Minor surgeries like castration and dehorning are sometimes unavoidable. Proper use of local anaesthetic, pain killers and, sometimes, even sedation will reduce the pain and stress associated with them. However, even with the best care in the world these procedures can cause stress on the animals which, in turn, will affect growth rates and productivity and make them more prone to disease. If it's possible to avoid carrying out these procedures at all then great, but in most situations, as a rule of thumb, getting them done while the animal is relatively young will be less stressful than in an older animal. Use of a rubber ring for castration and disbudding (either with paste or heat cautery) in animals under a week of age will be better for the animal than surgical castration or dehorning later in life.

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Lameness

In dairy cows, sheep and beef cows, lameness is an issue in our national herd and flock. It is heavily damaging to the productivity of affected animals, takes significant time and expense to treat and leads to higher incidences of culling. Lameness is also a very easily visible issue to even the relatively untrained eye of the public and not a good look for our industry.



Unfortunately, and perhaps unsurprisingly, there isn't a single solution to all. However, it should be a regular and ongoing conversation between farmers and vets on almost all farms. Recording and monitoring cases, as well as examining cases to ascertain the cause of lameness, will allow your vet to advise on the best control, prevention and treatment options and keep you informed with the most up to date advice and research.

It's also worth bearing in mind that as vets we see a large number of different farms and can be in a good position to bring ideas to the table which we've seen work well elsewhere.

Use of pain killers

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs work really well as pain killers in cattle and sheep. The option of products with short meat withdrawals and zero milk withdrawals also make them extremely convenient to use and a pour on formulation is even available for some scenarios. With our guidance, it is likely that almost all animals undergoing a disease process such as pneumonia, metritis or mastitis or a painful episode such as lameness, injury, parturition or surgery will benefit from the use of these drugs. Their use really is to be encouraged!

The examples above are only a few of where the welfare of the animals on a farm goes hand in hand with the profitability of the business. The idea that welfare and production appear in two separate sections of a farm health plan is one which we should be moving away from and we would encourage you to make use of your vets' expertise on welfare matters to get your flock or herd working for you in the way you want.

If you would like to talk to us about any animal welfare issue, please give us a call. We would be happy to help in any way we can.

Alpaca blood donation drive



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01935 813288

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Fay Pooley, Scarsdale farm vet and Advanced Practitioner Certificate holder in camelid practice, recently completed a successful socially distanced, bio-secure, alpaca blood donation day. Fay talks us through the day and explains how it can be lifesaving to sick cria (baby alpaca).

"The alpaca blood donation day was really successful. Due to COVID-19 social distancing and PPE measures, the drive was completed with the use of an alpaca chute. This is a handling system where the animal can be restrained for a period of time, with minimal personnel involved.

"The idea of these donation days is to take blood from donor animals, the blood is then sent to Pet Blood Bank UK for processing. In return for 1 bag of whole blood we get two bags of plasma and 1 bag of red cells, the plasma is frozen and can be stored for up to 5 years.

"The plasma can then be used to help treat poorly cria on the same farm as the donor animal. The procedure itself usually takes about half an hour, most of the time is spent securing the alpaca, making sure it is safe and comfortable. The blood draw site is then prepared, it needs to be clipped and scrubbed to make sure the skin is as sterile as we can get it in a farm setting, local anaesthetic is also used so that the alpaca doesn't feel the collection needle going in.

"After the preparation, the donation can commence. There needs to be a free, uninterrupted flow of blood from the animal into the collection bag until the bag reaches the correct weight. This normally takes around 5-8 minutes, the needle is then removed, and a bandage is placed over the site used to take the blood.

Why is the blood drive important?

"Due to alpacas becoming more popular as livestock and pets, donation days like this are vital so that each farmer or owner has a store of plasma available to them for poorly cria. For biosecurity reasons, the plasma is only to be used on animals from the herd it's taken from. Diseases such as Mycoplasma can be carried in the blood and spread by the sharing of blood products. There are also different disease challenges on every farm that the donor animal will have antibodies to.

"Cria are born without any antibodies and rely solely on colostrum to obtain them. There is no transfer of these vital antibodies across the placenta. In the first six hours the antibodies in the colostrum can pass through the gut wall into the cria's blood. The ability for them to cross the gut wall declines over the first twelve hours as the gut wall closes and becomes impermeable. If the cria doesn't receive enough colostrum in this crucial window, it is left open to potentially fatal infections.

"Treatment of these infections in cria needs to be swift and targeted; by using the plasma we have harvested from these donation days we can put antibodies straight in to the blood of the cria. The treatment is multi-modal but the plasma goes a long way towards helping the crias' own immune system gain time to be able to fight the infection.

"We'd like to extend a huge thank you to Pet Blood Bank UK, Sarah Flint for the use of her facilities and all of our lovely clients that came along for the blood drive. We've now received all the plasma back, ready to be used on sick cria at the donor farms!"

If you would like to be involved in something similar or would like more information on blood donation, please give us a call.

