# WENSUM VALLEY VETS NEWSLETTER

New Ovacyte Worm and Fluke Egg Counting Machine

The practice has invested in a state-of-the-art worm egg counting machine which can identify all relevant species of worm present in sheep and cattle in the UK, and fluke eggs!

SCOPS/COWS recommend Faecal testing in Winter, Spring and Late Summer, during the chronic disease risk period every 4-8 weeks.

However a more achievable approach would be to conduct Faecal Testing at housing, followed by a Faecal Egg Count Reduction Test (FECRT) if positive results are detected, and then to test again 2 months following turn out to look for reinfection from the pasture.
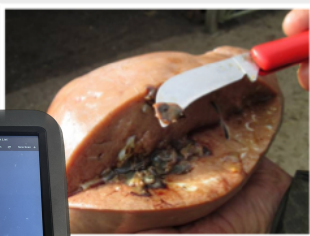
Ram Care

In the next few months, many shepherds will be thinking about the 'tupping' season – i.e., releasing a fertile male amongst a flock of female ewes. With sheep gestation being between 142 – 152 days (around 5 months) tupping time may vary between farms depending on when the lambing period is desired. In the next few months, ensuring your rams are fit, sound and healthy is essential for good performance.

Things to Consider:

- Good nutrition - rams should ideally be in a body condition score of 3.5-4/5. They will expend a lot of energy in a short period which can cause a considerable loss of condition. A high protein ration will help with condition and support mature sperm production, therefore increasing fertility.

- Worm/fluke status - worms and fluke can contribute to loss of condition, low energy and reduction in immune system, which can all negatively

September 2024

effect fertility. Testing for worms and fluke should ideally be done 2 weeks prior to tupping to allow time for a faecal egg count reduction test (FECRT) which is used to determine if treatment has been successful.

- Temperature: The temperature of ram testicles should be cooler than that of the core - therefore during warmer times, ensuring wool is trimmed away to aid cooling will be beneficial. Temperatures within the testicles that are too high can affect sperm production. Ideally rams would be shorn 6 weeks before the ram is introduced to the ewes.

- Genitalia: Examination of the reproductive tract around breeding time is essential - palpate the scrotum checking for any sign of pain or irregularities. They should be of even size and consistency and feel firm to touch. Examine the prepuce and penis end for any signs of blood or abnormal discharge that may indicate infection. Scrotal circumference for a mature ram should be >36cm.

- Vaccinations - vaccination against Clostridial disease +/- Pasteurella should be administered around 10 weeks prior to tupping.

Fertility Testing:

We are well equipped to perform both bull and ram fertility testing, with electroejaculation as an option to assess sperm vitality and therefore breeding potential.

This involves collecting semen and grading the sperm under a microscope to assess quantity, quality, structure and mobility.

Ram electroejaculator

It is rare for complete infertility in rams, however as many as 30% of rams are 'sub- fertile' which may result in more barren ewes and a longer lambing period.

Fertility testing assesses sperm characteristics as an indicator of breeding potential. Factors such as libido and ability to mount (affected by lameness etc.) can only be assessed by observation and should not be overlooked.

Rams should be examined 2 months before the start of the breeding season. Note that ill health can affect sperm production for up to 6 weeks.

Epididymitis:

The most common cause of infertility or reduced fertility in rams. Primarily caused by **Brucella ovis*** bacteria with occasionally other bacterial species too.

- Diagnosis is made by external palpation, feeling for pain on palpation, and an enlarged epididymis (palpated at the bottom of each testicle).

- Culturing of semen and blood testing are sometimes used to identify the cause of the condition. Epididymitis can be prevented by giving all rams a fertility investigation before purchase and use. Treatment is rarely effective as the damage already done is usually permanent.

*Brucella ovis is not transmissible to humans unlike other species of Brucella