

## Mastitis in Ewes

Mastitis in ewes is usually, although not always, caused by a bacterial infection in the ewe's udder. Over 30 types of bacteria are known to cause mastitis in sheep and these infections can be subclinical, exhibiting no visible sign of infection and therefore go unnoticed, or they may be clinical. Clinical cases show signs of heat, swelling and pain in the udder. Ewes can often appear lame on a back leg because of this. Udders can also become cold and hard once tissue has become gangrenous, as is often the case with black bag. Cases of mastitis can cause significant impacts on costs of production and efficiency through both direct costs e.g. treatments and additional labour costs, as well as indirect costs e.g. reduced lamb growth rates, as ewes are often reluctant to allow lambs to suck. They also tend to have milk changes, (clots, watery discharges etc) and reduced milk yields, as well as producing poorer quality milk. Ewes with subclinical infections can still have a reduction in milk quality and as a result lamb performance can still be negatively impacted.

**The AHDB funded study Validating Sheep Key Performance Indicators Project demonstrated that lambs from ewes that had a case of clinical mastitis failed to reach the flock target of 20kg at 8 weeks, weighing less than 17kg.**

### Risk factors:

- Low body condition score at lambing has been linked to both clinical and subclinical mastitis
- Underfeeding protein and energy in pregnancy and lactation
- Poor udder conformation (slightly forward and downward facing teats and udders should be higher than the level of the hock)
- Poor hygiene at lambing allows environmental bacteria to multiply and pose a bigger challenge to ewes
- Ewes and lambs remaining indoors for increased length of time
- Lumps in the udder – often found at weaning or pretupping. These lumps are typically abscesses which can be a source of infection to the ewe and others in the flock, particularly if lambs cross suckle they are not receiving enough milk from their own mother.
- Teat lesions allow bacteria to enter and are an ideal environment for bacteria to live and grow.



*Bethany Collins*

### **Maedi Visna**

**MV is a virus that can cause mastitis within flocks. It has a long latent period meaning it spreads through the body without signs for months to years and infection cannot be cured. You may also see signs of respiratory disease. MV can be rapidly spread through nasal secretions and from ewe to lamb via colostrum and milk. If there is an increased level of culling due to mastitis and pneumonia this may be worth looking investigating.**



Well, if the amount of lambings that we are attending is any indication, then everyone is in the thick of things too! Thankfully there don't seem to be many cases of sheep abortions in evidence, no doubt because the majority of problems are being abated by vaccination against Enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis. Ring-womb cases seem to be prevalent though, and can be difficult for folks to pick up if they've not seen many before. Typically, it is a ewe which looks like she has been lambing for a few hours, with nothing to show for it. Examination of these cases shows that the cervix is sometimes only dilated by a few centimetres. Often all the membranes are still intact inside the ewe, but sometimes a water bag or membranes may be seen hanging from behind her.

If you're not sure if it is a true case of ring-womb, or rather a protracted first stage of labour, check again in one or two hours. If there is a putrid discharge, then that confirms the diagnosis and the outlook for the sheep is poor. If, after an hour or two, she is still in the same position with a cervix only one or two centimetres dilated, then it probably is a case of ring-womb. In most cases the cervix will dilate under mild to moderate digital pressure, but also many don't. It's very easy to go in with too much pressure and split the cervix through into the abdominal cavity- which is game over for the sheep. If you're not sure, or need help- give us a call. We see a lot of these cases and deal with everyone's worst lambings. We will commonly administer an epidural which means that we can try a controlled dilation without putting the sheep through distress, as dilation can be a very painful procedure. No-one knows what really causes these ring-womb cases but there is evidence that too many oestrogenic plants such as clover may predispose. There may also be a symptom of energy deficiency such as in twin-lamb,, and some instances of vaginal prolapse. If the cervix is unaffected after 5 or 10 minutes, then we'll usually progress straight on to a caesarean section of the ewe, and then the lambs look in a healthy state. Happy lambing!

*Richard Knight*

## Animal Health and Welfare Pathway- Cattle

Subsidies in farming are changing, and with 2023 being the last year the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) will run, the government is rolling out new schemes to help farmers. The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway (AHWP) was launched in late 2022, and applications for the scheme opened at the start of this year for farms in England. It is not yet open for farms in Wales or Scotland.

### How does the scheme work?

The scheme focuses on improving animal health and welfare through a clear set of priorities, which for cattle (both beef and dairy), include:

- Tackling Bovine Viral Diarrhoea
- Reducing lameness and mastitis
- Upgrading Housing; focusing on:
  - young stock buildings,
  - ventilation,
  - cow comfort
  - enrichment
- Improving pain management during castration, disbudding and dehorning
- Improving welfare of cattle at pastures



The steps of the pathway are as follows:

#### **1. You need to register your interest in the scheme at:**

[apply-for-an-annual-health-and-welfare-review.defra.gov.uk/apply/register-your-interest/enter-your-crn](https://www.gov.uk/apply/register-your-interest/enter-your-crn)

Only one enterprise can be reviewed currently, but will be opened to multiple enterprises and applications (both cattle and sheep) in the near future.

#### **2. Vets visit on farm:**

This will be a 2-3 hour on farm visit to assess and identify areas that could be improved, and to take the required samples needed for the scheme (see testing requirements). Payment rates towards the visit and testing are:

- £522 for beef cattle
- £372 for dairy cattle

#### **3. A report will be produced by your vet:**

This report is specific to the AHWP and is designed to complement your farm assurance scheme, not replace it. It will include recommendations and actions to improve your livestock's health and welfare. The report does not need to be shared with DEFRA but test results will need to be submitted.

#### **4. Claim your Funding:**

You will be required to provide evidence of the review having taken place, the payment will be paid directly to you, the farmer, by the Rural Payment Agency (RPA).

## Important Notes:

One application can be made per 10 month period  
There is a 6 month window between the start of the application and the review (you must have eligible stock to test within this time period)  
You can apply and un-apply without penalty provided no work on the pathway has begun.

### Eligibility criteria

To be eligible to apply you must have one of the following, and be responsible for their welfare:

- 11 or more beef cattle
- 11 or more dairy cattle

Your business must have:

- A single business identifier (SBI) linked to a country parish holding (CPH) number in England. The CPH can be permanent or temporary.
- You should be eligible for the BPS or anticipating applying for the BPS in 2023. To be eligible for BPS the SBI must have at least 5 hectares of BPS land and 5 or more BPS entitlements on 16 May 2022.

### Testing Requirements to Receive Funding

Beef Cattle- Blood antibody test for BVD on 6 animals (up to two different groups) aged 9-18 months

Dairy Cattle- Bulk Milk antibody for BVD or Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) Bulk milk test

**\*These test cannot be run in the practice and need to be submitted to an accredited lab\***

### Other Grants

Animal Health and Welfare Capital Grants can also be applied for ranging from £1000- £25,000 and the review can include recommendations for these grants. They offer:

- Smaller grants: where you can select for from a list of equipment and technological items, such as; mobile/fixed cattle handling systems, crushes, calving gates, etc.
- Larger grants: for infrastructure changes, such as new housing, building upgrades and pasture improvements.

**\*These grants are competitive\***

A full list of eligible equipment can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farming-equipment-and-technology-fund-fetf-2023/annex-4-fetf-2023-animal-health-and-welfare-eligible-items>

Please speak to one of the team today for any further information on the scheme or to book your vet visit.

*Cara Hatfield*