

Welcome back Nieves

I'm sure many of you will be glad to hear that Nieves is returning from Maternity leave in mid-April. She is looking forward to returning and seeing lots of her usual clients for a good catch up!

Flock check



MSD have once again launched their flock check for 2023 which requires a blood test to check for enzootic abortion (EAE) and toxoplasmosis. Sheep farmers that have 2% of their flock barren or aborting can take advantage of the scheme with 6-8 blood samples being sent for subsidised testing.

2022 results showed nearly 75% of 374 sheep farms had been exposed to toxoplasmosis and 18% to enzootic abortion. This naturally leads to a reduction in profit and flock potential. Toxoplasmosis not only leads to abortion but also caused embryonic loss and weak or sickly lambs therefore increasing workload for the farmer.

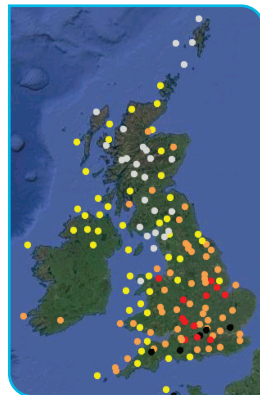
Toxoplasmosis can be picked up from the environment especially in cat faeces meaning that it is a lot trickier to prevent infection other than by means of vaccination. The eggs can survive in the environment for up to a year leading to problems year on year as well.

Enzootic abortion is often unknowingly bought in when purchasing replacement stock and so even vaccination alone is not enough to fully prevent problems. Speaking to your vet can help to identify the best purchasing policies to avoid major issues.

The FlockCheck scheme is running from 1st February to 30th June 2023 so please call us if you want to get involved.

Nematodirus

Whilst the weather is still very changeable we thought it was about time to put out the initial warnings for nematodirus. The eggs hatch after a period of cold weather followed by conditions of 10°C or more and this often leads to a mass hatch situation. The results can be devastating with significant numbers of deaths often with very few signs seen prior to death. The lambs most affected are of 6-12 weeks old and eating significant amounts of grass but are not yet old enough to have developed resistance. Keep an eye on the SCOPS nematodirus forecast and our social media channels to identify when your local area is at highest risk. Often a white wormer is required to help ease the burden. Pictured is the current forecast as of end of March.



Calving course



Last week we successfully ran our first calving course in almost 8 years. It was a great success with lots of practical experience and top tips gained. We are hoping to run more of these courses over the coming months and already have a waiting list so if you or any of your staff members would be keen to get involved please give us a call on 01477 571000. The course attendees will also be provided with a certificate which will be valid for Red Tractor training purposes.

Nottingham collaboration

From May we will be increasing our collaboration with the University of Nottingham. Most of you will have met our current vet from Nottingham, Emily Payne, over the last year and from May a second vet from Nottingham, Vicki Rhodes, will be joining 3 days a week. They are joining Wright & Morten alongside final year veterinary students on rotations. These students will have completed all of their required teaching and will have spent a number of weeks on farms as part of animal husbandry and farm vet placements.

Emily and Vicki will both be bringing a wealth of experience to the team, having worked in farm animal practice for a number of years and having gained further qualifications in the field. Emily has achieved the status of European diplomate of bovine health and management and Vicki is currently working towards the same qualification.



There are a number of advantages to this collaborative work with the university, including extra man power on farm and access to a whole host of expertise. Emily has already assisted the team greatly in data analysis for our dairy herds and has helped plan and deliver bespoke farm meetings to help you optimise your farm. We also have greater access to the wider university team and have already run farmer meetings on topics such as fertility, beef nutrition and TB as well as doing consultancy visits in the fields of youngstock, fertility, mastitis and TB. Your usual Wright & Morten vets will always be involved in collaborative meetings allowing for the best suggestions to be made.

We hope you will join us in welcoming Vicki, Emily and the students to Wright & Morten and that you will help us in shaping the farm vets of the future.

Bank holidays reminders

We wanted to give you all a little reminder about the upcoming bank holidays throughout April and May as we have 5 in total (one more than usual). As always we will have vets available on call during the bank holidays but it will impact routine visits and TB testing. Please find dates below and ring us well in advance if you want to book in visits or to order medicines.

- Friday 7th April
- Monday 10th April
- Monday 1st May
- Monday 8th May
- Monday 29th May

Digital Dermatitis

Subtitle

Digital dermatitis (DD) is an **infectious** condition of the foot caused by a group of bacteria called Treponemes. The Treponeme bacteria live on the skin of infected cows and there are several different strains. DD is thought to affect the majority of UK dairy herds and many beef herds. The infection can present in various ways, but most commonly results in ulcers and/or warts just above the heel bulbs of the foot.

The treponemes causing DD have also been associated with complicated interdigital growths, necrotic toes, severe cases of heel erosion, sole ulcers and foul in the foot, in addition to teat necrosis and udder sores. There is evidence that DD is spread in slurry but for the DD infection to cause lesions, the skin must first be damaged, usually by prolonged wetting. Therefore slurry management is an important component of DD control. Infection is worse when cows' immunity is low and when the skin around the feet is in poor health. The disease is more prevalent in housed herds with poor hygiene and wet conditions. NADIS data shows a higher instance of digital dermatitis during September – November.

The average cost associated with an uncomplicated digital dermatitis case is approximately £82-90 per case in dairy cattle. This loss is mainly attributable to milk yield loss and an increased calving interval. However, these costs are likely to be an under estimate.

What are the clinical signs of the disease?

The disease presents as lesions which follow 5 stages:

- the paintbrush lesion: a few matted hairs
- the pink lesion: loss of hair and skin damage
- the red lesion; more severe skin damage
- the white lesion: longer term lesion with the skin producing white keratin plugs
- the black lesion: a scab over the damaged skin

Digital dermatitis causes pain and discomfort and can result in lameness. The majority of cows with the disease will withdraw their foot rapidly if pressure is applied to affected area e.g., water pressure from a hose.

Treatment

Blitz treatment of all individual cows affected (with a lesion) has the best impact on reducing DD in herds.

Cattle infected with DD may walk on their toes or shake their feet whilst stood. However, other cattle with DD lesions may show no signs of lameness/altered gait at all.

Early identification and treatment of lesions is the most effective way of managing DD (alongside prevention). This can be done by hosing off the heels in the parlour and looking for abnormal heel skin. A small mirror can be helpful to see under the heel bulbs in the parlour.

Treatment is most effective when cows are restrained in a crush, the foot lifted and cleaned before treatment. Other causes of lameness (other than DD) can be ruled out if the foot is trimmed first. Trimming away eroded heel horn may reveal DD under the heel and may increase the exposure of the lesion to treatment.

- Clean the foot – especially the pocket of skin between the heels, either with running water or a brush in disinfectant.
- Dry lesions (e.g. disposal blue towel)
- Apply a licenced antibacterial product (e.g. copper gel or salicylic acid) or topical oxytetracycline spray.
- Return to a clean, dry yard avoiding exposure to slurry and mud.
- Repeat the treatment daily until resolved (at least 3 days).

Photos courtesy of Wright and Morten's Foot Trimmer Bryan Roberston



The 3 pronged approach will help reduce DD incidence and limit its impact in the herd:

1. Keep it out

- If you don't currently have DD in the herd, keep it out, preferably by maintaining a closed herd.
- Even herds that already have the disease should implement strict biosecurity measures, as there are many species of Treponemes, some of which produce more severe disease. Therefore, you want to avoid bring new strains into your herd.
- If buying in, buy from as few sources as possible, with a known history of low DD prevalence. Inspect all 4 feet of bought-in cattle and treat any lesions. Keep a close eye for milk lesions.
- Bacteria can be carried on objects too. Avoid sharing equipment. Have disinfection facilities for boots, equipment and visitors.
- Use dedicated claw trimming equipment that has never been used on other farms. If using an external foot trimmer, ensure knives are disinfected between farms and between cattle with DD lesions.

2. Don't let it spread

- (a) **Avoid transmission between cows and between groups**
 - Segregate cattle with lesions until they have healed – these animals are the main reservoir of infection.
 - Change gloves between treating cows.
- (b) **Reduce your reservoir of infection**
 - The sooner cattle with DD lesions are treated, the sooner they will recover. This means other cows in the herd are less likely to become infected too.
 - Blitz treatment means lifting the feet of ALL cows with DD lesions, cleaning, drying and treating with a licenced topical product.
 - Cattle with regular recurring chronic cases of DD should either be segregated from the herd or culled.

(c) Early detection system

- Early cases of DD are rarely very lame! By using at least one of these methods, DD lesions will be picked up quicker.
- Regular (i.e. 2-weekly) mobility scoring by a trained operator to detect mildly lame cows with new lesions.
- Pedometers
- Wash feet off in the parlour and inspect feet using a small mirror.

(d) Treat promptly and effectively

- Don't wait, treat all cases immediately.
- Use approved licenced treatments.

(e) Use footbaths effectively

- If done badly, footbathing can make the DD infection worse. This is because the skin can be damaged by chemicals or wetting, and/or the footbath becomes grossly contaminated and helps spread the DD bacteria from cow to cow.
- When done well, hoof disinfection can reduce spread of infection and limit the severity of lesions.
- Dirty feet do not disinfect easily – wash feet beforehand if necessary.
- Use an approved disinfectant (not antibiotic) and check the dilution carefully. Adjust the frequency of use depending on challenge and infection level.

3. Build resilience (healthy skin)

(a) Promote healthy skin

- Slurry and moisture damage the skin above the hooves; keeping feet clean and dry promotes healthier skin with better defences against infection.
- Clean, dry feet are more likely with: good cow comfort (longer time lying down, out of the slurry); low standing times (e.g. during milking); wide passages and no overcrowding; good manure handling, such as with slatted floors; regular scraping and no broken concrete; good ventilation; dry bedding

(b) Build resistance through genetics

- Some individuals are more prone to DD; do not breed from these cows
- Use the AHDB Lameness Advantage to select sires with Predicted Transmitting Ability (PTA) to reduce the incidence of lameness

(c) Build resistance through strong immunity

- There is no DD vaccine, and details about individual cow immunity are complex
- Reduce stress by focusing on good transition cow management, avoiding overcrowding and reducing unnecessary group changes.

Biosecurity

The main source of infection are other cattle with lesions. Once a herd is infected with digital dermatitis, it appears impossible to eradicate, but it can be effectively treated and prevented at individual cow level.

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