

Black Sheep Farm Health

April 2019 Newsletter



The Field Report

It's all systems go for lambing and calving. The kind winter appears to have benefitted the livestock, although there are always trade-offs. For example, we're getting a lot of reports of fat ewes prolapsing. In addition, fat cows (especially heifers) need to be watched carefully for calving difficulties.

We have also been very impressed with the number of you taking a risk-based approach to antibiotic use in lambs, rather than blanket use. For any advice on this or colostrum management, don't hesitate to get in touch.

Mastering Medicines 2019 - register your interest

Following the success of last year's sessions we will put on one or more similar courses after lambing. 98% of attendees last year said the course was 'definitely' or 'mostly' useful to their work. The next dates will most likely be in May and June.

To register your interest, just let us know on 01669 838 288 or email kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk.

Listeriosis Alert (SAC 'On The Hoof' report)

In February SAC released the alert below — we have seen several cases of abortion, neurological disease and even human skin infection associated with calving cows without a glove!

'We have had a run of cases associated with listerial infection including both bovine and ovine abortions, encephalitis, and suspected listerial enteritis (to be confirmed). This was a bit unexpected given the dry start to summer 2018, but a number of factors may have favoured listerial multiplication. High dry matter baled silage can have a high pH due to reduced fermentation, and may be poorly consolidated making it difficult to maintain anaerobic conditions. Soil contamination could be high if the sward was cut low to compensate for poor grass yields resulting in high ash content on analysis. August and September were wet so later cut silage may have been of poorer quality. Several disease outbreaks have occurred shortly after the introduction of silage.

- **Listerial encephalitis** – Damage to the buccal mucosa allows the entry of *L. monocytogenes* and the bacteria slowly travels to the brainstem via the cranial nerves. It takes 10 to 21 days for clinical signs to become apparent so cases may continue after suspect forage is removed. Isolation of *L. monocytogenes* can be difficult and diagnosis often requires histopathology.
- **Gastrointestinal/septicaemic** - Localisation of ingested *Listeria sp.* in the abomasal or intestinal wall can result in clinical signs of scour within two days. Subsequent septicaemia can lead to the development of pin point abscesses in the liver. Bacteriology +/- histopathology is required for a diagnosis.
- **Reproductive** - Foetal infection with *Listeria spp.* can occur at any stage of gestation and abortion (often of autolytic foetuses) occurs from seven days post infection. Pin point hepatic abscesses may be seen. Culture of *Listeria spp.* from foetal stomach contents confirms the cause of abortion.

Farmers should be advised to feed the best available silage to reduce the risk of losses in the run up to lambing and calving'

High Barren Rate or Abortions? Free testing for Toxoplasma and Enzootic Abortion

Barren rates of over 2-3% warrant investigation. MSD Animal Health are offering subsidised testing ('FlockCheck') for two major causes of barren ewes/abortion (Toxoplasmosis and EAE). The test just requires a blood sample from 6-8 barren/aborted ewes. The same samples can be tested for other infectious causes (e.g. Border Disease) and trace element status at the same time.

It is also important when blood sampling to assess body condition of ewes. If lean, we recommend taking a faecal sample for worm egg counts to ensure excessive parasite burden is not taking its toll on fertility.

Telephone the practice on 01669 838 288 to discuss barren rates, and if/what testing would be appropriate to investigate barren ewes in your flock.



Use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatories at lambing and calving

Nick Hope, veterinary student at University of Cambridge

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) use in sheep and cattle is also often overlooked due to a perceived lack of pain alongside a lack of time at lambing and calving. However, the benefits of a dose of NSAID following a difficult lambing/calving can be substantial for both dam and lamb/calf comfort, as well as post-lambing productivity. It has been shown that a dose given to a ewe following a difficult lambing can encourage a ewe to return to the feeding troughs earlier and for longer, increasing their intake and their milk production. Similarly, a dose in a lamb following a difficult lambing decreases pain sensation and so increases the strength of the suck reflex and as such increases milk intake and lamb viability in the vital first few days of life. NSAID use at castration, dehorning and tail docking has been shown to enhance feed intake and growth rates in the days immediately following these procedures and a more rapid increase in bodyweight.

In cattle, NSAIDs are widely used in treating mastitis, lameness, respiratory disease and joint infection in young calves. However, use is often overlooked after difficult calvings and after castration and dehorning because of cost and lack of perceived need for pain relief. NSAIDs are particularly effective against acute pain, increasing comfort and feed intake in dams following difficult calvings. Newborn calves that experience stress and trauma during birth often have a slow start and a dose of NSAID has been shown to improve vigour over the first few days of life.

Currently our NSAID of choice is meloxicam (brand name 'Recocam'). It is administered under the skin at a rate of 1ml/40kg. One dose lasts 2-3 days. There is no licensed NSAID for sheep, although meloxicam products are licensed in different countries at a dose rate of 1ml/20kg. Although flunixin products are currently off the market, 'Hexasol' is a combination of flunixin and oxytetracycline which is still available. In a similar vein, 'Zeleris' is a combination of meloxicam and florfenicol.

Although blanket use is not advisable, there is scope to use NSAIDs more regularly and usefully around calving and lambing to increase both animal comfort and production.



BSFH Sync & AI in suckler cows — Year 2

Following the success of the Sync & AI programme in 2018, we are already out serving the first cows for spring calving 2020. Jack averaged conception rates of 69% and 72% for cows and heifers respectively.



AI not only allows access to bulls of higher genetic merit — whether that relates to growth rates, calving ease etc — but also tightens the calving period, resulting in a more even batch of calves and less time watching cows at calving. In addition, if you have a great stock bull that is starting to come back over his daughters, AI can provide an alternative sire for these, thus prolonging his working life. We have managed to reduce the number of handlings to just 3, with slightly different timings for heifers versus cows.

Success is highly dependent on cow management and so requires careful planning well in advance of planned service. We are also very happy to help with bull selection and interpretation of EBVs if you wish. Call Jack on 01669 838 288 or 07793 078949 for a discussion on how AI might work in your herd.