

Black Sheep Farm Health

August 2020 Newsletter



The Field Report

The weather has been particularly catchy this year so far, so we live in hope of an Indian summer. Nonetheless, even at this temperature, vaccines quickly overheat and lose their effectiveness—read on for more on keeping them cool, in addition to advice on autumn calver nutrition and tup head injuries.

Avoiding Over-Fat Autumn Calvers

Autumn calvers are typically at higher risk of needing assistance than spring calvers. Much of this difference can be attributed to the ample supply of high-quality grass available to autumn calvers for most of their pregnancy. An over-conditioned cow will deposit fat in their pelvis which narrows the exit for the calf. She will also grow a larger calf. Managing body condition is a year-round exercise and attempting rapid change at any time of the year is not recommended. In particular, **do not attempt to starve condition off cows in the last third of gestation**: all this achieves is thin cows with little colostrum.

Measure the condition of each cow at calving this autumn and consider whether they are at (or near) the target of 3.0. If they are consistently over-fit, this will be having an impact on calving ease, and subsequently calf survival and cow fertility.

Steps to mitigate over-fit cows include:

- **Delaying weaning** (but ensure each cow is weaned at least 3 weeks before she is due to calve for adequate colostrum)
- **Put cows on the poorest pasture possible** maximising their grazing time and hence their exercise and fitness. This would not be best for the calf at foot so creep feeding would be required OR wean cows early, put their calves on to aftermaths and heavily graze dry cows on poor quality pastures. As a rough guide, stocking rates should be double normal numbers
- With later calvers being the fittest **it might be worthwhile splitting the herd and weaning at different times**
- Always ensure sufficient minerals are available, in particular magnesium
- **Consider housing the fattest cows so that feed intakes can be controlled.** The target for a 650kg cow would be around 70MJ ME / day. As well as minerals and vitamins ensure that the ration supplies at least 10% crude protein
- Turn cows and calves back out to grass quickly with a high magnesium mineral available

New Office Additions

We thought Hazel and Carole might have been getting lonely at Black Sheep HQ, so meet the new additions to the staff!



We are looking for names, so send in your suggestions. Based on their colour, Jenny has suggested 'Trodax' and 'Zolvix' - can you do better?

Time to order Toxovax!

It's that time of year again. Remember 'Toxovax' needs to be given to replacements **at least 3 weeks before tupping.**

The vaccine is viable for a very short period after being manufactured so we need to co-ordinate with the drug company on how many doses we need and when to ensure supply.

Ring the office now to organise your order in good time: 01669 838 288.



Call out for cool bags

We are starting to get depleted of cool bags at the surgery. We're very happy people are using them; if you could return them when you're next in we would appreciate it.

Have a dig around in those pick-ups and drug cupboards! You might even get a reward for bringing them back...

Fridges: Not all are created equal

Have you checked your vaccines fridge is at the correct temperature for storing vaccines? Vaccines must be stored in the fridge at between 2 - 8°C. Some alarming research carried out by MSD showed that of the on-farm fridges for storing vaccines they looked at – 100% of fridges failed to keep within that temperature range. 70% of fridges recorded a reading below 0°C. Vaccines are damaged and no longer work once frozen.

How much does your farm spend on preventative vaccines each year and how much are you wasting when vaccines are not working after being frozen in a fridge? We occasionally investigate vaccine failures in animals and how many vaccines failed to work when injected due to incorrect storage. Most domestic fridges aren't good enough for vaccine storage and pharmaceutical fridges are required, typically costing a few hundred pounds.

If you're sceptical about needing to replace your fridge, why not buy a fridge thermometer for less than £10 and find out what your fridge is doing – might be the best investment you ever buy.

If there is sufficient interest, **Kaz will look into group purchasing of small drugs fridges - email or ring him (kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk, 07557 092 760)** to register your interest. In the meantime, the practice can arrange purchase of a fridge thermometer.



Your vaccines are probably even more valuable than your beer - we recommend a dedicated fridge!

Head Injuries in Tups

In the run up to tup sales and tugging, all eyes are on the boys. Typically, this is when we start to notice things going wrong...

Head wounds

Fights between tups are commonplace. They frequently leave wounds on the head, and can even be fatal. While keeping them separate is not always practical, if you notice problem tups, or problem pairs of tups, causing trouble on a frequent basis, consider removing them.

Wounds should be treated as soon as possible. Generally they do not require stitching but if in any doubt contact us. Topical antibiotic sprays are a sensible choice, and can be followed up with an aluminium wound spray to form a seal over the wound. If the affected tup looks sore or miserable, consider the need for an anti-inflammatory for its pain relief properties.

Secondary issues

Orf: Skin wounds act as an entry point for the orf virus. Typical lesions - scabby warts - may then develop with potential for further bacterial infection (see below).

There is no specific treatment for orf as it is a viral infection and we rarely use antiviral drugs in veterinary medicine. However application of antibiotic spray (e.g 'Cyclospray') is prudent as a measure to protect against bacterial infection. Isolate affected tups to limit spread to others.

As always with orf, **wear gloves** when handling animals which may have it. It is a painful infection in people too which often takes weeks or months to clear up.

Bacterial infections: These may follow orf infection, or invade of their own accord. As mentioned above, treatment of fresh wound with a topical antibiotic spray is sensible.

If the infection is already present and you can see or smell pus, a course of penicillin is sensible as well. This spring we post-mortem'd a tup with neurological issues, which turned out to be a brain abscess, mostly likely as a result of infection tracking down the horn bud from a head wound!

Flies: A constant menace. They are drawn to normal horn secretions as well as the blood and tissue fluid from wounds. While they should receive the standard preventative products as the ewes do, an extra application will do no harm. Be careful not to apply product directly onto the broken skin as this may impede wound healing. If you are selling tups, there are colourless products available for both fly prevention and wound healing.