

# Black Sheep Farm Health



December 2020 Newsletter

## The Field Report

What a year it has been. 2020 has reminded us how lucky we are to work in an essential field, and in a reasonably COVID-safe environment. We look forward to welcoming you all back to farmers meetings, and enjoying a cup of coffee over the farmhouse tables once normality returns. With beef and sheep prices comparing favourably to the 5-year average, and considerable challenges on the horizon, we think now is the time to get the 'house in order' with regard to livestock health. Don't forget we are here to help you do that.

Aside from that, we wish all of our clients a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! See you in 2021...

## Good News Update! Antibiotic use in Agriculture

This has been a year when bad news seems to have buried much of the good. Here are some key facts from a recent RUMA (Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture) update:

1. Antibiotic use in UK agriculture **halved between 2014 and 2019.**
2. Antibiotic use in sheep is low (average 5.6mg/PCU - do you know yours?! It's in your health plan) but sheep make up 40% of the UK livestock biomass and **areas identified for improvement are: lameness, abortion and use at lambing.**
3. The target for the beef sector is to **reduce use by 10%, or down to 10mg/PCU** - whichever is lowest. Have you achieved this on your farm?
4. **Prophylactic use of antibiotics is no longer the acceptable norm.**
5. The highest priority **critically important antibiotics have been reserved for human health**, meaning they are very rarely used now and only after laboratory testing confirms the need to do so.

The UK's excellent progress has exceeded targets but there is still no room for complacency; there are 700,000 deaths annually due to multi-resistant infections, which could rise to 10m by 2050 without continued progress.

## SAC/APHA Thin Ewe Project: FREE TESTING AVAILABLE FOR A SHORT TIME ONLY

APHA and SAC St Boswells are looking to recruit farmers who would like to investigate the cause of ill-thrift in breeding ewes. They are offering free post-mortem for three ewes from each recruited farm for a limited time—until the end of December 2020. These may be ewe identified for removal from the flock due to poor condition at tugging, or ewes removed as empty at scanning.

They will look and test specifically for 'iceberg diseases': OPA, Johne's, MV and border disease, in addition to other causes of ill-thrift. A report will be provided back to you. The **post-mortem examination and subsequent testing will be free of charge.** The aim is that this study will help inform the causes of ill-thrift and poor condition in breeding ewes. Samples will also be collected (anonymised) to help our research into developing new tests. Numbers are limited and this project is on a **first come, first served basis.**



If you are interested, or want to know what useful information this testing could give you, get in touch with us to arrange testing as there is a **short questionnaire** to fill out. The ewes will also **need to be taken live to St Boswells.**



## Fluke Update: What is the risk from silage? Update from SAC

“Can cattle or sheep be infected with liver fluke from silage?” has been a frequently asked question at farmer meetings over the last few years. The answer has always been that the risk is likely to be low based on the facts that:

- silage fields will usually have been lightly grazed earlier in the year.
- the grass is usually cut before fluke numbers peak in autumn.
- the wettest areas of the field (where fluke numbers are likely to be highest) are not suitable for cutting.

Researchers at Liverpool University have carried out experiments to determine whether or not liver fluke are capable of surviving in silage. Liver fluke were ensiled with grass that had been wilted to create samples with 20, 30 or 40% dry matter, and their viability was assessed 2, 6 and 10 weeks later. Where anaerobic conditions had been maintained all liver fluke were non-viable by 2 weeks post ensiling. The pH of the silage samples ranged from 5.08 to 6.14 indicating some suboptimal fermentation. No silage additives were used. The same experiment was repeated under conditions representative of aerobic spoilage. Viable liver fluke were detected at 2, 6 and 10 weeks in the 20% DM sample; 2 and 6 weeks in the 30% DM sample; and after 2 weeks in the 40% DM sample. The pH range was 9.03 to 9.36. The researchers concluded that:



- **There is no risk of liver fluke transmission from anaerobically fermented silage fed from 2 weeks post sealing.**
- Liver fluke can survive for a period of time under aerobic conditions and therefore **spoiled forages may represent a risk particularly if the dry matter is low.**
- Ensuring adequate wilting to increase dry matter and achieving a good seal to create anaerobic conditions remain key in the silage making process.

The outcomes of this research are nice and clear and yet another reason not to feed any potentially spoiled silage.

### Xmas/New Year Office Hours

As always, **our out-of-hours service is available 24/7 365 for emergencies.** Don't forget it really helps if drug orders can be organised well in advance of the festive period.

21st Dec: Open as usual  
22nd: Open as usual  
23rd: Open as usual  
24th: 08:30—16:00  
25th: CLOSED  
26th: (Saturday)  
27th: (Sunday)  
28th: CLOSED  
29th: Open as usual  
30th: Open as usual  
31st: 08:30—16:00  
1st Jan: CLOSED  
2nd: (Saturday)  
3rd: (Sunday)  
4th: Back to normal

### Weaning Weight Competition 2020/21: FREE HIRE OF WEIGH SCALES

As you are weaning calves, do not forget to submit your results to Kaz (kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk) if you want to be entered for the weaning weight competition. First prize has yet to be decided but last year's was a bottle of Hepple Gin!

Remember the BSFH weigh scales are **free to hire for clients at any time of the year** - just ring us to book them out. For two of the categories we will need cow weights as well.

