

# Black Sheep Farm Health

February 2018 Newsletter



## The Field Report

Welcome to the first Black Sheep Farm Health Newsletter! We'll keep you updated on how we're developing our service for you. There will also be concise refresher articles on seasonal conditions or new initiatives. If you have had a strong scanning percentage then the first article is especially pertinent - capitalise on those extra lambs by optimising your colostrum management.

Finally, thanks go to our first clients for joining us in this new venture. We believe the farmer-vet relationship forms the basis of a successful farm animal practice, and we will be working towards a healthy and prosperous 2018 for all of our clients.

Any comments or feature ideas for the newsletter are welcomed - don't hesitate to email Kaz at [kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk](mailto:kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk).

## Dates for your Diary

- **\*\*\*Practice Open Evening with introduction to our complete AI service for cattle\*\*\*** 18:00 meet at practice, for talk at 19:00 27th Feb Coquetvale Hotel, Rothbury. Dinner provided.
- **Are you BVDFree?** 19:00 14th Feb Whittingham Memorial Institute. Refreshments provided.

## Colostrum management at lambing

### Key Points

- **Lambs need sufficient volume of colostrum, of sufficient quality, as soon as possible.**
- **Keep oral antibiotics only for when you need them; this will preserve effectiveness and save money.**
- **By far the best replacement for a ewe's colostrum is that of another healthy ewe on the same farm.**
- **Of the supplements available, *Immucol* is recommended because it has the highest concentration of antibody.**

The campaign '**#ColostrumIsGold**' aims to get all livestock farmers maximising the benefits of colostrum. This may seem obvious - any shepherd knows that colostrum is the foundation of a good lambing season. However, there are means of managing your colostrum supply so that lambs that would otherwise go hungry get their fair share. The campaign focusses on three Qs:

**Quality** – Concentration of antibody and fat content. Quality of colostrum can be affected by: ewe nutrition, vaccination of ewes, number of lambs carried, disease in the ewe around lambing, and breed e.g. Suffolk colostrum has a lower % fat than Blackface colostrum. If you have doubts about your colostrum quality across the flock, there are some simple tests we can use to monitor this.

**Quantity** – Current guidelines advocate 50ml/kg as soon as possible and 200ml/kg within 24 hours. In practice this means a 4kg lamb requires 200ml at its first feed, 400ml within 3 hours and 800ml by 24 hours – these are *minimum* figures; if in doubt round up. Small lambs, and those lambing outside, require more colostrum to keep warm.

**Quickness** – Both the quality of colostrum and the ability of the lambs to absorb antibody declines rapidly in the first 36 hours after lambing. The sooner the lamb gets its quota of colostrum, the better.

In conjunction with lambing hygiene and ewe nutrition, colostrum management should not only increase your lamb vitality, but also cut your antibiotic bill. Many farms should be able to reduce dependence on oral doses such as *Spectam* or *Orojet*.

Many lambs may not be covered by their oral dose anyway. For example, *E. coli* is the bug responsible for watery mouth and also lamb scour. Many lambs get a routine dose to protect them; however recent government data shows that about 50% of *E. coli* samples from lambs are resistant to the active ingredient in *Spectam*.

If there have been historical issues with watery mouth, joint ill or lamb scour on your farm, a compromise can be made. Rather than completely stopping the use of oral antibiotics in lambs, assign groups of lambs a risk status (See Table 1). Leave the low risk lambs untreated and monitor your progress. Bear in mind that hygiene and nutrition must also be sound if you are to eliminate the use of oral doses.

Table 1: Criteria for assigning a risk status to lambs

Status	Example
High risk	Lambs in groups that have had recent clinical cases Triplet or low birthweight lambs Poor body condition ewe Dirty environment Lambs born later in lambing period
Low risk	Fit healthy single Clean environment Lambs born early in lambing period

### Topping up hungry lambs

Surplus colostrum from your own ewes (those with singles, those that have lost their lambs to exposure, or particularly milky ewes) is the gold standard. Avoid ewes that have aborted their lambs to limit potential spread of disease. Harvest this as soon as possible after lambing and hygienically – ideally wear gloves, use clean containers and avoid harvesting straw and muck at the same time – into convenient volumes. This can then either be refrigerated for up to one week, or frozen at -18°C for up to one year. Don't microwave frozen colostrum to reheat it - this breaks down proteins, including the vital antibodies. Any donor animals should be from the same farm and vaccinated for clostridial disease.

Second choice is goat colostrum, although it should be screened for CAEv (the goat equivalent of Maedi-Visna). We advise against using cow colostrum as it risks introducing Johne's to the flock. In addition, a proportion of cows produce milk that is toxic to lambs. It is also not as dense in protein or energy.

Recent independent work by Murray Corke and students at the University of Cambridge assessed the concentration of antibodies and fat content of fourteen commercial supplements, relative to ewe colostrum. Fat content compared favourably in most of the products. However, all fell short of ewe colostrum in terms of antibody concentration. They ranged from about 10% - 67% of the concentration in ewe colostrum, and *Immucol Platinum* emerged as the best in this respect. In any case, artificial colostrum is best considered a supplement rather than a replacement.

# IMMUCOL®

Work by Corke indicated, of 14 supplements tested, Immucol Platinum had the greatest concentration of antibody.

For advice on colostrum management or any other aspect of husbandry at lambing, don't hesitate to telephone the practice. Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) are also publishing case studies and other resources to help farmers and vets, which can be found from February 1<sup>st</sup> via [www.farmantibiotics.org](http://www.farmantibiotics.org).

### Exotic Disease Update: Avian Influenza and African Swine Fever

Avian influenza has been detected in wild birds in both Dorset and Warwickshire. As a result the Avian Influenza Prevention Zone has been put in place for all of England. Any poultry keeper must, by law, follow specific disease prevention measures designed to reduce the risk of infection from wild birds. Recent outbreaks have affected backyard flocks so all keepers should be vigilant for outbreaks of sudden death in their flocks.

The APHA have also reiterated their advice on not feeding kitchen scraps to pigs. The practice, though illegal, is common and risks introducing African Swine Fever and Foot and Mouth Disease into the UK.

