

Black Sheep Farm Health

February 2020 Newsletter



The Field Report

Whisper it quietly, but spring is definitely coming. With it comes lambing - hence our sheep focus in this issue of the BSFH newsletter. Getting parasites and nutrition in order will pay dividends when it comes to lambing itself.

There's an update on our weaning weight competition as well - send in your figures to have a chance of winning: you've got to be in it win it!

Congratulations Jenny

Lots of you have been asking: George Christy Learnihan arrived on 9th January 2019, weighing in at 8lb 4oz.

We've already got his Black Sheep overalls sorted— although he has some growing to do!



Lambing Courses 2020

As usual, we're putting on couple of sessions this spring.

Practical Lambing: Novice, Saturday 7th March

An introduction to the fundamentals of lambing. Ideal for beginners, and for lambing assistants who have done a season or two who want to hone their skills.

Practical Lambing: Advanced, Sunday 8th March

The advanced course recaps the material covered in the novice course. In addition, it takes a 365-day approach to a successful lambing.

Both courses approximately 10am - 3pm and £50 ex.VAT. Ring 01669 838 288 or email Kaz.Strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk to book your place or for more details.



Protein in Ewes at lambing: the latest

Just like cows, ewes experience a spike in energy and protein requirements in late pregnancy to fuel lamb growth, udder development and colostrum production. A lack of protein is known to compromise ewe health - increasing the rates of mastitis and increasing the worm eggs shed by ewes onto pasture. Any direct impact on lambs has been less clear.

Recently, the University of Edinburgh blood tested every ewe in their flock of Cheviot mules. They found that about 50% had low albumin levels, reflecting long term protein status. Strikingly, the ewes with lower protein were more likely to:

- Lose lambs between scanning and tagging.
- Have lambs that require assistance colostrum feeding.

Protein supplementation is expensive - so confirming a genuine deficiency should be the first step before changing any ration. Likewise, the UoE recommend a comprehensive overhaul of fluke and worm control (see overleaf) to ensure protein losses to these parasites are not the root cause of protein deficiency. Analysis of forages should be standard practice year-to-year.



If you have any questions regarding protein supplementation, or checking your flock's status, don't hesitate to get in touch on 01669 838 288 or on one of our vet's mobiles. We also have some of the 'Feeding the Ewe' manuals from the AHDB which are an excellent reference on sheep nutrition.



Parasites Alert: Fluke and Worms

Life is often about trade-offs. While the damp mild weather has helped with grass growth, the absence of persistent hard frosts has given many parasites an easy winter. Off the back of a wet summer, the infectious challenge to stock, especially sheep, is now at high levels.

Liver Fluke: The infectious stage of fluke is inactive below 10°C. This infectious stage emerges from mud snails - hence 'flukey' pastures are typically wet ones. Warmer wetter years are becoming more common

Testing for fluke: Typically at this time of year we use either the **bulk liver fluke egg count**, looking for eggs (indicating the presence of adult fluke in the gallbladder), or the newer **coproantigen test** which can pick up younger fluke in the animal. Both require a dung sample - if you're unsure about whether to treat, or which product to use, these tests will help you make that decision.

Gut worms: Just as liver fluke thrives in mild wet conditions, so do the worms that cause PGE (parasitic gastroenteritis). Our lamb SAC recently released an update stating that PGE had been diagnosed recently in multiple batches of ewe lambs and gimmers as cause of death.

Testing for worms: Collect 6 dung samples per batch and we can perform a **worm egg count** in house. This gives us an idea of the degree of burden. Unlike fluke - which we would advise treating for if even one egg was detected - it is normal and healthy for sheep to carry a small worm burden. Only if burdens exceed this level do we advise treating.

Get those samples in!

Weaning Weights Competition Update

There is still time to get your data in and win a bottle of Hepple Gin (or your preferred tippie): either drop them into the practice or email kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk. All farms are allocated a number to ensure anonymity (see graphs).

Thank you very much to the clients that have contributed so far - can you spot your results?

Lots to discuss: target cow:calf weaning weight ratio is 50% e.g a 700kg cow should wean a 350 kg calf. So far most are not far off (in the 40s generally) BUT each farm's best has weaned at least >55% of their bodyweight. Interestingly one farm is a stand out in the maternal weights - any guesses on the cow breed?

It's worth noting that many factors play a role in weaning weights as each system is different: age, cow vs heifer, breed, inputs, farm geography et cetera. The most useful comparisons are made between similar farms - not least your own in the past or future.

