

Black Sheep Farm Health

July 2019 Newsletter



The Field Report

After a couple of false starts, the summer appears to finally be upon us. With only the stragglers left to calve, much of our time is spent in the office (as many of you like to point out!) organising health plans, collating data, planning new projects and having the odd ice cream. Jack has also been busy synchronising and serving cows and heifers; over 40% of our clients have now used the Black Sheep Sync-and-AI service.

Read on for information on a new XLVets project on liver fluke in sheep, and also on control of Johnes in sheep flocks. This disease is getting more attention now in suckler herds, although it is present in 64% of UK sheep flocks.

Flies remain a nuisance - if you're encountering more than the odd flystruck sheep then get in touch and we can investigate appropriate changes to managing the condition.

Cool Bag Amnesty:

Part II

After an excellent response to our amnesty earlier in the year, the returned bags have disappeared as soon as they have come back in!



If you have some stashed in your medicines cupboard please bring them in otherwise Kaz will not be allowed to go on holiday!

XLVets Fluke Sentinel Project

Black Sheep are participating in a new project co-ordinated by XLVets. Over thirty practices across Great Britain are collaborating on the Fluke Sentinel project to monitor when sheep get exposed to liver fluke.

Each practice is working with a farm they nominated on the back of a previous clinical liver fluke problem. Using a recently developed test that detects antibodies to fluke larvae, lambs will be sampled monthly from July to September. Once lambs have been exposed and generate these antibodies (known as 'seroconversion') the national map will be updated at the webpage www.flukesentinel.co.uk, and tweeted by @XLVets.

This is not a forecast *per se*. Liver fluke is an extremely local issue, even varying between locations on the same farm. The aim of the project is to highlight the potential of this new test and progress our understanding of the disease.

The costs of testing are being sponsored by Norbrook.

The locations of the XLVets practices taking part in the Fluke Sentinel Project



Johne's disease in sheep

Written by Jess Parker, final year student at the University of Liverpool

Ovine Johne's Disease (OJD) is a chronic wasting disease caused by *Mycobacterium avium subsp. paratuberculosis* (known as MAP) resulting in gut inflammation. This inflammation means the gut struggles to absorb nutrients, and also leaks more. Affected animals become progressively thinner before eventually dying.

There are two strains of MAP, one for cattle and one for sheep. However, there appears to be cross-transmission of these strains between cattle and sheep. This is important if sheep share grazing with cattle, especially if the herd are in a high-health scheme. A recent study showed that **64% of UK flocks tested positive for disease.**



- **Main source of infection for uninfected flocks is bought-in stock**
- Disease is spread through faeces, as well as across the placenta and through the milk to lambs
- Bacteria can survive in the environment for up to 18 months
- An 'iceberg disease' i.e. for every clinical animal there are often another 10-15 shedding but without signs. Other iceberg diseases include maedi-visna and OPA (jaagsietke).

Infection occurs mainly in young animals (<6 months old). However, clinical signs do not become visible until 2-3 years of age. Signs are non-specific and include:

- Thin to emaciated, but bright
- Reduced lambing and rearing percentages
- Non-responsiveness to worm and fluke treatments
- Scouring (not a common feature of the disease unlike cattle) and too weak to stand in very late stages

There is no perfect test but it is **recommended to submit any thin ewes dying early for post-mortem and submit pooled faecal samples from 10 thin, poor performing ewes for testing.** As faecal testing can show false negatives, it is important to test at least two or three pooled samples per flock for the most accurate results. It is key to consider any other causes of lean ewes such as fluke, MV, OPA, broken mouth or simply undernutrition. Many of these tests can be combined in a cull or barren ewe investigation.

There is no treatment for OJD. Control measures should focus on breaking the cycle of transmission from ewe to lamb and thereby reducing significant economic losses. Practically this means:

For flocks of unknown status:

- Determine flock Johne's status by investigating lean ewes - barren or cull ewes before they are sold, or fallen lean ewes. This may involve sampling blood and/or muck, and post-mortems.

For flocks with confirmed or suspected freedom from OJD:

- Keep it out! Breed your own replacements, and vaccinate bought-in animals.

For flocks with confirmed OJD:

- Vaccinate all replacements with 'Gudair' for lifetime cover. This will not eliminate Johne's from a flock but significantly reduces shedding in faeces and keep levels low enough to minimise the impact on productivity.
- Cull hard for any sign of wasting or leanness: shedding increases in the later stages of the disease.

To organise a cull ewe screens, or for advice on the management of Johne's, do not hesitate to get in touch on 01669 838 288.

