

# Black Sheep Farm Health

March 2018 Newsletter



## The Field Report

The last two months has raced by for everyone at Black Sheep. At time of writing, we're in the throes of the 'Beast from the East'. Not that you'd know from the weather, spring is just around the corner - we're looking forward to getting out and assisting with this season's lambing and calvings.

The success of the coming weeks is the fruit of a year's worth of work and planning. When things go wrong at a late stage, it can be tempting to ignore it, or write it off as 'one of those things'. Our advice is to resist that temptation, and with that in mind, this month we focus on a practical approach to abortion in sheep.

Here's to a productive spring...

## Dates for your Diary

**Advanced lambing course - 14th March, 10am-4pm, Netherwitton.**

In depth practical skills and theory for experienced lambers to hone their skills. Very limited places: £50 per person ex. VAT. Phone the practice for more details.

## The Black Sheep Flock grows

Many of you will recognise a 'new' face at the practice....

Carole Bell grew up on a local farm and has worked in the veterinary sector for over 17 years as a receptionist and small animal assistant. Carole's interests include music, history, reading, Hepple WI, growing vegetables and fruit for the odd bottle of fruit liqueur, as well as flower borders which are a work in progress.



## Abortion in Sheep: A proactive approach

### Key Points

- Any abortion in replacement stock, any cluster of abortions, or an abortion rate of over 2% should always be investigated.
- Many infections that cause abortion can also cause small weak lambs.
- A consistent rational approach to abortion is key - isolate, collect, disinfect, and treat.
- If submitting samples - submit the placenta with aborted lambs.

Extensive planning goes into achieving a decent scanning percentage - the next step is to get those lambs born, alive and well. On SDA farms, flocks in the top third of producers consistently have fewer lambs born dead per ewe when compared with those in the bottom third (Stocktake, AHDB Beef and Lamb). The costs of abortion extend beyond loss of a lamb; there are costs in treating sick ewes, and in rearing weak or poor-doing lambs.

An abortion rate of up to 2% (or one in fifty) is considered acceptable. If ewes start to abort in greater numbers, the outbreak should be investigated. In addition, any replacements that abort should be considered high risk even if apparently vaccinated. Likewise, any aborting ewe that is also sick requires veterinary attention - not only for her own welfare, but because this indicates a more serious causes of abortion.

The causes of abortion in sheep are many and varied. However the majority are infectious, rather than nutritional or stress-related. Of the infectious causes, the 'big three' are:

- *Chlamydophila abortus* A.K.A Enzootic Abortion of Ewes (EAE)
- *Toxoplasma gondii* A.K.A 'Toxo'
- *Campylobacter*



It is important to remember that infections causing abortion also frequently cause weak, small or sickly lambs which are much more prone to dying within 48 hours of birth.

**Abortion Protocols - do you have one?**

A 'protocol' sounds very formal but in practice as long as the approach to each case is rational and consistent, you have a protocol. If you have a number of different staff, new or inexperienced members of your lambing team may benefit from having access to a written copy in the lambing shed. A suitable protocol would include the following steps:

- ISOLATION and MARKING:** Move the ewe out of the group pen/field. Use a marker spray or tag for later identification.
- GATHER ABORTED MATERIAL:** this includes the placenta. Avoid collecting bedding/muck if possible. Collect in a plastic bag and store in a cool place until submission to a lab or disposal.
- CLEAN AND DISINFECT:** Ensure all contaminated material is removed and disposed of effectively - burning is an appropriate means of disposal. Follow this with thorough disinfection of the immediate area.
- TREAT EWE :** Consult your vet if the ewe is showing signs of sickness.

**Fostering on to aborted ewes**

EAE frequently passes to lambs when they suckle via vaginal secretions that dribble down the udder. Replacement ewe lambs then go on to abort and shed EAE at their own lambing. For this reason many vets advise against fostering lambs on to these ewes.

This can seem a waste - assuming the ewe is fit and milky, she would otherwise be capable of rearing two decent lambs. In these cases, a sensible compromise is to foster on lambs only if they are

definitely NOT to be used for breeding e.g. male mule lambs, or fat lambs.

**Cleanliness is next to godliness**

Personal hygiene is paramount to reduce disease transmission and safeguard your own health. Stomach bugs at lambing time are both uncomfortable and inconvenient. Pregnant women should avoid lambing sheep at all costs.

Lambing Info						Lamb Management						
Date	Time	Spray Mark (Lambing order)	Ewe ID (Ear tag)	Lambs born		Lamb tag numbers	Navel dip	Birth weight (kg)	Sex	Cast-rate	Dock	Notes (C-fostering)
				Alive	Dead							
5/02/17	15:30 PM	40	03175 0220168	2	0	2516	✓	5.44	F		✓	
						2517	✓	5.29	F		✓	
5/2/17	17:00	41	01080 220168	2	0	2518	✓	5.24	F		✓	
						2519	✓	5.36	M	✓	✓	
5/2/17	18:40	42	01111 0220168	1	0	2520	✓	6.75	M	✓	✓	
6/2/17	1:00 pm	43	01347 0220168	2	0	2521	✓	4.45	M	✓	✓	
						2522	✓	5.15	M	✓	✓	
5/1/17	05:35 am	44	01729 0220168	1	0	2523	✓	5.6	M	✓	✓	
5/2/17	9:00 am	45	01106 0220168	2	0	2524	✓	2.97	F	✓	✓	FO
						2525		5.33	M	✓	✓	
5/2/17	9:45 am	46	01564 0220168	2	0	2526	✓	2.765	M	✓	✓	W
						2527	✓	2.46	F	✓	✓	W
4/2/17	11:50	47	01595 0220168	2	0	2528	✓	4.2	M	✓	✓	
						2529	✓	3.9	F	✓	✓	

**A good lambing register - iodine is optional**

**Recording abortion**

Decent records are key to planning and benchmarking in future years. Try and get into the habit of recording abortions and other lamb losses. This should help pinpoint and quantify where losses are being made, which in turn should help target changes in management.

**Complete Cattle AI Package**

Thanks to everyone who braved the snow on the 27th to come to the practice open evening and AI talk; it was great to see you all there! If you missed the meeting and would like to know more, keep your eyes peeled for a feature in the next newsletter. Alternatively phone the practice or email Jack at Jack.Sheldrake@bsfh.co.uk.