

Black Sheep Farm Health

March 2020 Newsletter



The Field Report

At the time of writing, the weather appears to have a welcome improvement and, although still sodden, we seem to have dodged the worst of the floods seen by communities further south and west. Between that and lighter evenings, hopefully this will make for a reasonably painless lambing and calving. Nonetheless, preparation is always key, and that sets the theme for much of the newsletter—observations made this year will pay dividends when making changes for next year.

Jobs to get done before lambing and calving

Once the spring rush is underway it becomes increasingly difficult to focus our attention on less urgent tasks. Even once it slows down, other jobs such as cutting or dosing lambs quickly fill the space. The following jobs are much easier while livestock are inside but can easily get missed before turnout:

CATTLE

- PD Autumn calvers
- BVD Check Test
- Any metabolic sampling (energy, protein or trace elements): 1-4 weeks pre-calving
- Scour vaccine (12-3weeks pre-calving)
- Body Condition Scoring

SHEEP

- Boost clostridial vaccines (e.g. Heptavac): 4-6 weeks pre-lambing
- Any metabolic sampling (energy, protein or trace elements): 2-4 weeks pre-lambing
- Body Condition Scoring

Anti-inflammatories at lambing and calving

Inflammation is one of the body's key responses to infection and damage. However it is also responsible for pain. In the long term it causes scarring of tissue with a subsequent loss of function. One example would be untreated metritis (or 'whites') in cows which ends up scarring the uterus leading to a significant reduction in fertility.

Anti-inflammatory drugs are therefore a vital part of our arsenal when dealing with sick animals. Generally we use a particular group called non-steroidal anti-inflammatories, or 'NSAIDs'. NSAIDs include ketoprofen ('Ketofen') and meloxicam ('Metacam' and 'Recocam'), as well as human counterparts like ibuprofen.

NSAIDs reduce long term scarring - increasing the likelihood of retaining a functional organ whether that is an udder in mastitis or a lung in pneumonia. They also reduce fever, improve appetite and (critically) reduce pain. Eating and feeling bright can make a great difference to recovery. The exception is for animals that have become dehydrated e.g severely scouring calves - NSAIDs should only be used very carefully in these situations.

Uptake of NSAIDs is improving, and we would encourage you to consider using them in several instances, including:

- **Twin lamb disease**
- **A difficult or rotten lambing or calving**
- **Mastitis or metritis**
- **Joint ill**
- **Lameness**
- **At disbudding and castration***



* Although these animals aren't sick, there is plenty of evidence that the pain and stress of these procedures significantly slows growth, and also that NSAIDs reverse this effect.



You can't improve what you don't measure: data collection at lambing

Georgie Hopgood, final year student at the Royal Veterinary College

As the last scanning results come in, it is always interesting to note how most farmers see the importance of this type of benchmarking; a decent scanning % and low barren rate is certainly a good place to start. However the rearing percentage, or number of lambs sold, is a more relevant indicator of a successful and profitable sheep enterprise. To minimise losses between scanning and sale, we must first get an accurate record of when and how those losses occur.

Up to the point of lambing, the cost of each newborn lamb has been estimated at £20-25 and recent data suggests lamb losses range from 4% to 21% between scanning and sale. The money to produce these lambs is wasted if they are lost. Therefore, minimising losses around lambing has the potential to make savings for many farms but recording data around lambing is essential for this.

What data should I collect?

· Lamb losses:

o Number of lambs that die

o Divide these losses into when they died, e.g. born dead, died within 48 hours/before turnout/ before tailing, died 2 days+/after turnout/after tailing, died after weaning, etc,

o Reasons for death, e.g. predators, laid on, watery mouth, joint ill, weather, abnormality, hypothermia, etc. It might be difficult when outdoor lambing to identify cause of death for every lamb but estimating proportions of lambs dying from different causes can be useful.

o Number of lambs weaned

o Lambs reared, i.e. number of lambs sold (finished/ store/ breeding) or kept for breeding

· Ewe losses (and reasons)

· Abortions

· Problem ewes, e.g. assisted lambing, prolapse, poor mothers – can identify those not to keep next year, helping to save valuable time around lambing.

· Scanning – although too late for many farms for this lambing season, scanning records are invaluable for many reasons, for example identifying barren ewes and matching nutrition but also to compare number of lambs predicted at scanning (scanning percentage) with those born alive (lambing percentage). This, considering number of ewes put to tup, may suggest problems with abortion or nutrition.

How should I record this data?

The important thing is that the data is recorded but keep the records in whichever way works for your farm.

Recording lamb losses can be as simple as a tally chart for causes of death and time after birth, maybe in a notebook or on a blackboard, by EID or recording on a mobile phone. If you have multiple people helping with lambing then make sure everyone knows to keep records.

What should I do with this data?

We can discuss these results with you; this can help highlight areas which are working well on farm and areas where we may be able to make management changes to try and minimise lamb losses. Keeping records can allow us to compare year on year data, and monitor progress.



Spring Orders

The 2020 list for calving and lambing orders is enclosed with your newsletter for those of you who haven't gotten around to placing yours. It pays to prepare!