

# Black Sheep Farm Health

April 2023 Newsletter



## The Heavy Cost of Assisted Calvings

The level of “normal” calving interventions varies widely between farms but is an important consideration when thinking about farm profitability. We often select for bigger, more shapely carcasses, but these are inherently more difficult to calve, and there are costs associated with both profitability and animal welfare.

The DIRECT costs of assisted calvings include:

- **Calf deaths or disease:** Calves that have assisted births are less vigorous and twice as likely not to receive sufficient colostrum. As a result, these calves are more likely to suffer from joint ill, navel ill or scour, and are five times more likely to die in early life.
- **Dead cows:** Not as common as calf mortalities at calvings, but a real risk nonetheless in assisted calvings.
- **Vet and medicines costs**
- **Animal welfare:** There are many ways in which assisted calvings can compromise animal welfare such as pain to the cow (particularly with a caesarean section) and calf (through the force of the calving jack or rib fractures).
- **Human safety:** There is always risk of injury when handling and calving cows. This risk is avoided or reduced if she calves herself.

The INDIRECT costs associated with assisted calvings are often harder to quantify but include:

- **Reduced productivity:** The cow may take longer to get back in calf, leading to a later born, smaller calf at next weaning time. She may even fail to conceive in the next bulling period, resulting in the cost of feeding an empty cow and the cost of an additional replacement.
- **Opportunity cost:** What you could be doing if you weren't assisting calvings.

There are a few things to consider to improve calving ease. The first and most important point is to quantify how many calvings in a season require assistance. The targets for assisted calvings are <5% in cows and <15% in heifers. Then we can consider the genetics of bulls and pelvic measuring heifers to improve calving ease.

## Opening Hours

To make sure that everyone can get what they need through lambing and calving, the office will be **open on Saturday mornings**, including Easter weekend, throughout April from **9 am to 1 pm**.

The office will be closed both Good Friday (7th) and Easter Monday (10th).

## Efficient Suckler Cow Client Meeting: Wednesday 17th May

Morning meeting covering sustainable beef production, EBVs and AI followed by a farm walk at Aln Angus.

**Wednesday 17th May, 10 am start**

**Bolton Village Hall, Bolton, NE66 2EE**

Kindly sponsored by CEVA and hosted by George Burrell. Please RSVP by calling the practice or emailing [info@bsfh.co.uk](mailto:info@bsfh.co.uk)



## Bovine Abortions

There are many causes of bovine abortion including:

- **Non-infectious causes** ie iodine deficiency, genetic defects, trauma, other disease in the dam.
- **Infectious causes** ie salmonella, leptospirosis, neospora, listeria, campylobacter, Q fever, BVD, IBR, Bacillus licheniformis.

Any aborted animal should be isolated from other animals, the aborted material removed and the area where she aborted disinfected and re-bedded. It is important to note that any bovine abortion is NOTIFIABLE and should be tested for brucella. If you have a cow abort, call the practice and we can arrange for someone to come out and collect the appropriate samples for Brucella. It is helpful if you have her tag number to hand when you call.

If you are seeing more than 2% of abortions or have had a few in close succession it is worthwhile investigating the cause further. The best way to do this is for us to take foetus and placenta samples to submit to the lab.



## Interdigital Hyperplasia – A Cause of Lameness

Interdigital hyperplasia, or fibromas, are firm masses that can protrude between the cleats of a cow and are more commonly seen on the hind feet. These are overgrowths of skin caused by chronic irritation such as grazing stubble or rough pasture, poor hygiene or following interdigital dermatitis. Foot overgrowth or poor foot conformation, and excessive body condition, can also contribute to these growths by causing excessive toe splaying and damage to the interdigital skin. Particularly when seen in young cattle, these growths are considered to be hereditary. Interdigital hyperplasia can result in lameness. To resolve the lameness, the growths can be surgically removed while the cow is restrained in the turnover crate. Keeping feet balanced through foot trimming is important for prevention and to slow the growth of existing lesions. Due to concerns about heritability, affected cattle, where no other cause is evident, should be culled or no longer be used to produce replacement animals.

### Iodine for dipping navels

Dipping calf and lamb navels with strong iodine (make sure its 10% BP) is an important measure in preventing navel and joint ill in young animals (along side colostrum and hygiene protocols). But it is important that the iodine bottle is clean and regularly washed out as there are certain bacteria that can grow in iodine solution. If using disposable bottles for navel dipping it is worth considering throwing the bottle away after a few refills or for reusable bottles dispose of the remainder of the bottle every few fills and clean the bottle thoroughly with disinfectant and water.

### Red Tractor – Mutilations

#### CATTLE

PROCEDURE/ METHOD		CONDITIONS OF USE			
		Animal age	Operator	Anaesthetic	Analgesic
Castration	Elastration/Rubber ring	1st week of life only	Competent stock person		
	Clamp/bloodless	Up to 2 months	Competent stock person		With
	Other method	Up to 2 months	Competent stock person	With	With
	When animal is over 2 months of age	Over 2 months	Vet Only	With	With
Disbudding	Chemical cauterisation	1st week of life only	Competent stock person		Recommended with
	Other method than above e.g. hot iron	Up to 2 months	Competent stock person	With	With
Dehorning	Cutting/sawing horn ( <b>must not</b> be used routinely)	Up to 5 months	Competent stock person	With	With
		Over 5 months	Vet Only	With	With
Removal of Supernumerary Teats	Using clean, sharp scissors	Up to 3 months	Competent stock person	With	With
		Over 3 months	Vet Only	With	With

It is important to be aware of the Red Tractor requirements for undertaking routine husbandry procedures and mutilations in cattle and sheep. Please do give us a call if you have any questions or concerns.

Castration over 3 months of age and dehorning over 5 months of age are vet only procedures and must be carried out by ourselves.

#### SHEEP

PROCEDURE/ METHOD		CONDITIONS OF USE			
		Animal age	Operator	Anaesthetic	Analgesic
Castration	Elastration/ Rubber ring	1st week of life only	Competent stock person		
	Clamp/ bloodless	Up to 3 months	Competent stock person		
	When the animal is over 3 months of age or where any methods other than above are used		Vet Only	With	With
Tail Docking*	Rubber Ring	1st week of life	Competent stock person		
	Hot iron/clamp	Up to 2 months	Competent stock person	With	
	Surgical/other	Any age	Vet Only	With	With
Dehorning and disbudding**	Trimming of insensitive tip of an in-growing horn	Any age	Competent stock person		
	All other cases	Any age	Vet Only	With	With

Anaesthetic (Pronestestic) is required in most situations and pain relief /analgesia (e.g. Metacam) are required in many situations. Adequate pain relief is important for animal welfare as well as ensuring production effects are kept to a minimum as a result of these procedures.