

Black Sheep Farm Health

August 2018 Newsletter



The Field Report

At the time of writing, one could be forgiven for mistaking the Coquet Valley for the set of a Western. Hopefully by the time this goes out the heavens will have opened and everything will be significantly greener.

Speaking of cowboys, Joe is on his holidays in the USA and Asia - look forward to a presentation on farming around the world! In the meantime, this edition of the newsletter focuses on sheep as we enter a critical period of the ovine year.

Keep Tups On Top Form

Key Points

- **Pick tups that are suitable for, and have been raised in, a system similar to your farm.**
- **All tups should undergo an examination at least 8 weeks prior to use, with semen testing for 'high-stakes' tups.**
- **Bought-in tups require several quarantine treatments, including for parasites and clostridial diseases.**
- **Teasers can be very useful but require careful selection and preparation.**

It is estimated that around 17 % of tups used in the UK are not fit for use. Consequences include a reduced lambing percentage and prolonged lambing period. A handful of key decisions help safeguard against disaster.

Tup Selection: how and where

As the sale season draws closer, tups up and down the country will be painstakingly coiffed and handsomely fed in preparation. Everyone has specific preferences depending on their farm and target market. However there are some common features every effective tup should share.

He should be condition score 3.5-4.0 i.e. fit not fat. His diet should be similar to what he will be fed at his new home, as changes may also upset his fertility. Sale tups can sometimes struggle to survive in real-life conditions, let alone serve an adequate number of ewes. Over-fat tups have reduced libido and reduced sperm quality.



Although tup sales are an integral part of the sheep calendar and great social events, bear in mind they have their drawbacks. Consider how many other sheep your new tup may have nose-to-nose contact with on sale day - each encounter is possibility for disease such as scab, CLA and others to spread between farms.

Tup Testing: his MOT

Tups should be examined in good time - **8 weeks prior to use** - as any corrections to his fertility will take this length of time to take effect. The examination can be broken up into physical (including legs, feet, brisket and fighting injuries), genital (penis and scrotum) and semen quality (sperm numbers, movement and shape). All tups should undergo a physical and genital examination. Semen testing is a great tool and is appropriate for 'high-stakes' tups:

- Being used for single-sire groups
- Being used for advanced reproduction e.g synchronisation.
- That have been flagged on examination as questionable.



Bought-in tups: give them a proper welcome

Tups should be brought onto the farm **at least 8 weeks before they are expected to work.**

As with any bought-in animals, the tups should be treated with a combination of an orange drench ('Zolvix') and a flukicide to avoid bringing in resistant worms and fluke, respectively. Tups should be vaccinated in line with flock policy - typically including clostridial disease and pasteurellosis.

If they are to be mixed with unfamiliar tups, pen them tightly to start with. This reduces the impact of fighting injuries.

If tups are expected to work in areas where ticks are present, they should also be sourced from tick areas. Failure to do so can mean tups contract louping ill or tick-borne fever for the first time, which results in a temporary loss of fertility during the tugging period. Alternatively tups may be bought as lambs, exposed to ticks to acquire immunity before they are needed, then used as shearlings.

Teasers: the ultimate wingmen

Teasers can be used to advance, and to synchronise, oestrus in ewes. **Potential teasers should be chosen carefully** - they should have a clean bill of health, be sexually mature and have good libido. He should also be home-bred to reduce the risk of introducing new diseases. Shearlings are ideal, rather than lambs or seasoned tups. In other words, ill-thrifty young animals or unsound animals that are knocking around should not be used as teasers. **Teasers are preferably made 4-6 weeks before they are needed.**

The procedure itself is reasonably straightforward. The tups should be starved for 24 hours prior to the operation, as it greatly improves the breathing of the tup under anaesthetic.

Afterwards, tups should be kept in a clean pen. After a few days, check the surgical site for signs of infection.

Tugging power needs to be good and adequate staff are needed to manage a more compact lambing. Teasers should be replaced after 1-2 breeding seasons as their effectiveness falls quickly after this.

Dates for your Diary

Mastering Medicines course: 4th September 18:00-20:00.

£40 ex.VAT, includes dinner and certificate of attendance. Book your place on 01669 838 288.

Black Sheep Farm Health Open Day: 17th September

Including a presentation on farming around the world by Joe Henry. More details to follow.

Thin ewes - don't ignore them!

The last 12 months has been testing for everyone, not least the ewes. Target body condition score for ewes at tugging are 2.5 (hill) or 3.0 (upland).

Weaning is a useful time to sort through the ewes so that different groups can be managed separately. Fat ewes can be grazed tightly to lose condition while thin ewes need plenty of good quality grass to gain condition in a reasonable timeframe.

Thin ewes that do not respond to this special treatment should be investigated. Common causes are:

- **Broken mouth**
- **Chronic fluke**
- **The 'iceberg diseases': Johne's, Maedi-Visna (MV) and OPA (Jaagsiekte)**



Just thin or something more sinister? MV is on the rise in commercial flocks

Broken mouths are identified easily on examination. Fluke can be found on pooled dung samples submitted to us at the practice. OPA diagnosis is tricky but it is possible to identify the disease in its later stages using an ultrasound scanner. Johne's and MV can be picked up on lab tests; SAC currently offers a low cost option to determine presence of MV in a flock - testing 12 thin ewes for about £50.

All of these disease can be picked up on post-mortem as well, so **consider routine PMs for fallen thin ewes.**

All of these diseases reduce a ewe's efficiency and quality of life - they are frequently barren, lack milk at lambing, or fall victim to further disease such as twin lamb or mastitis. The focus should be on **a) finding out which diseases are present on your farm, b) culling the poor performers, and c) preventing other ewes from falling victim to the same diseases.**