

Black Sheep Farm Health

December 2018 Newsletter



The Field Report

The nights have well and truly drawn in and despite a good dry start to the back end it has eventually given over to wet weather. Now cattle are in, all eyes and ears should be on calf pneumonia. The odd case is acceptable but more than a few warrants swift investigation.

Housing of course brings some advantages as cows are close at hand. This month we cover pregnancy diagnosis in both sheep and cattle - key tools to monitor herd health and profitability. Finally, some fresh eyes on preparation for Brexit and beyond; see overleaf for more details...

Dates for your Diary

BSFH Farmer Meeting:

Pre-Calving Evening with the University of Edinburgh

21st January 2019 (Time and Venue TBC but dinner will be provided!)

Rachel Bragg (Senior Clinical Training Scholar in Farm Animal Health and Production) will be speaking on pre-calving suckler cow nutrition and colostrum. Some of you have been involved in her work! The BSFH team will also be presenting on general calving advice and a new calf scour vaccine we will be stocking.

Kindly sponsored by Virbac.

Pregnancy Scanning for Spring Calving Cows: Accept no passengers

- Pregnancy diagnosis reflects the past year's management, and allows a predictor of costs/income.
- Feed/forage is the biggest cost on suckler farms and cows typically cost £350-500 to keep per year.
- Scanning can be combined with condition scoring, bolusing, worming and/or fluking.

Pregnancy diagnosis for cattle, as for sheep, is a key tool in running a reliably healthy and profitable cattle enterprise. **Many cows are going through the crush around housing anyway** for vaccinations, worming or bolusing. Pregnancy scanning can dovetail with this nicely as we can work at one end while you work away at the other. We generally find that most of our clients, never ones to miss an opportunity, also use the time to quiz us about anything and everything - a service we are glad to provide!



Clearly the results are a reflection of a year (or more) of preparation. If you're pleased with the results then we know the year's plan has worked; **generally aiming for 95% + in calf** so we can wean 94 calves per 100 cows. If they are a bit disappointing then we can investigate potential causes: infectious, nutritional or fertility-related. If the results are skewed towards a particular group (second calvers for example) then that may point to quite subtle and specific changes to nutrition or management. These **changes can then be put into place swiftly** - in time for the following year's calf crop.

It is also a **brilliant opportunity to condition score cows and target lean cows for extra feeding at this early stage**; if we leave this correction too late it can result in simply dragging big calves out of thin cows.

It is not just a case of marking your homework, although admittedly it can feel like results day. Knowing how many cows are in-calf allows you to work out how much shed space, bedding and feed you should need until turnout. It also **allows you to sell empty cows now rather than after a winter of feeding and bedding them**. Feed and forage typically forms 70% of suckler farm costs and a **suckler cow generally costs £350-500/year to keep - finding empty cows can therefore pay dividends as they can then be sold**. This year is no exception; it's estimated that straw alone will cost about £60 extra per head. In herds with both autumn and spring calving herds, empty cows can also drop into the autumn herd on the proviso that it's not an excuse to keep stragglers.

New Black Sheep Farm Health Service - Sheep Scanning

The BSFH team are delighted to announce our Sheep Scanning Service, headed by Joe. Scanning not only for pregnancy diagnosis but for singles vs multiple lambs is vital because it allows:

- An **early alert of a low scanning % and/or a high barren rate** (often a result of infectious disease, nutrition, or both)
- **Different management for different groups** (singles vs multiple lambs).
- An opportunity to put **hands on sheep and measure their condition.**

All of these are key to focussing resources where they are needed, whether that be preferentially feeding twins/triplets, culling barren ewes to reduce feed and bedding costs, or swift identification and resolution of costly infectious disease such as *Toxoplasma* or Border Disease. We can take relevant samples on the day and assist with body condition scoring.

Any flock size is welcome, as are goats. Hill sheep, hoggs and pedigree flocks are particularly welcome. For more information or to book your flock in, telephone the office on 01669 838 288.

Are you Fit for the Future? AHDB Resources

Recently, David Swales (head of strategic insight, AHDB) presented several scenarios for the future, relating to trade and agricultural policy. The projected impact on farm business incomes (FBI) in different farming sectors was then discussed. David also pointed out a new resource at www.ahdb.org.uk/brexit which includes a Brexit Impact Calculator, 'Horizon' impact reports and a Brexit toolkit.

The average upland beef and sheep farm does not fare very favourably in any scenario. In contrast, dairy farm business income stands to rise under 'Evolution' and 'Fortress UK', but fall in 'Unilateral Liberalisation'.

The purpose of this exercise is not (despite first impressions) intended to sow despair; at BSFH we know farmers are a resilient and industrious group. And these are projections, not prophecies.

Regardless, it is clear that **the top 25% of farms in terms of output:input ratios** are in a far stronger position to cope with changes.

Exactly what these changes will be remains to be seen but it seems significant change will come. Depending how much you trust our esteemed politicians, you may believe that the impending deal will bring a net benefit to the average upland beef/sheep farm.

If it does, then improving the quality of your farm business will help you capitalise on such a scenario. If it doesn't, then these changes will be crucial to thriving under a new status quo. For further information, visit www.ahdb.co.uk/brexit. Don't hesitate to contact us to discuss how changes to your veterinary input may bolster the resilience of your farm.

The scenarios



LFA beef & sheep

