

Black Sheep Farm Health

February 2019 Newsletter



The Field Report

While some you have already starting lambing and calving, for most this is a vital time of preparation. This is the focus of this issue: read on for more on checking cow and ewe nutrition, our pre-calving meeting, and gathering data at lambing. Our 2019 Lambing Order forms are also enclosed - don't forget to get your order in before you start!

Congratulations are also due to Jack who became a daddy - the first calves born to the BSFH Sync & AI package have been hitting the ground between Northumberland and Norfolk. If you're interested in how it could help your herd this year, don't hesitate to get in touch.

Metabolic Profiling - Energy and Protein are key

In the last 4-6 weeks of pregnancy, both ewes and cows enter a critical phase of production. Most of fetal growth occurs at this point, as well as udder development and colostrum production. Getting nutrition right at this point will give calves and lambs the best start possible. Getting it wrong contributes to outbreaks of mastitis, joint/navel ill, scour and pneumonia. Given increased scrutiny on feed costs, antibiotic use and animal welfare this is more important than ever.

Ration planning and analysis is one part of this. However, the ultimate measure of ration quality is how well the livestock are being supported by it. Energy and protein are key, especially for making high-quality colostrum. Based on our work last year, both can be surprisingly lacking in pre-calving/lambing rations.

Metabolic profiling is easily done:

- **Cows: Take 6 blood samples 1-3 weeks pre-calving.**
- **Ewes: Take 6 blood samples 2-3 weeks pre-lambing, from each group (singles, twins, triplets).**

The results will show if the ewes/cows are being supplied with adequate protein and energy. Given the variability in quality, silage-based rations should always be checked. Likewise, any changes to ration can be assessed to make sure they are having the desired effect.

For cows and ewes, proper energy and protein supply means they maintain condition in the post-calving period and so helps them get back in-calf. For calves and lambs, more colostrum of better quality means less disease and so less time nursing sick lambs/calves, lower antibiotic use, fewer deaths and better growth.

As a result, a small investment in time and money pre-calving/lambing can save you serious strife. If cows receive pre-calving treatments in the right timeframe (e.g. calf scour vaccine), the sampling can be combined to avoid running them through the race unnecessarily. The same samples can also be tested for minerals and trace elements, including magnesium and iodine.



Get in touch with the practice on 01669 838 288 to organise sampling at a convenient time



BSFH Spring Courses - Get signed up now!

Novice Lambing Course (13th February)

Advanced Lambing Course (14th February)

Practical Calving Course (27th February)

All courses are £50 + VAT and include lunch and a certificate of attendance. For more information, or to book your place on by ringing 01669 838 288 or emailing info@bsfh.co.uk.

A round-up of our pre-calving meeting: Colostrum is King

It was great to see everyone who attended for our January pre-calving meeting. Rachel Bragg (University of Edinburgh) brought the first conclusions from her study into suckler cow nutrition and colostrum in their calves. Thank you to those of you involved with the trial!

The key points were:

- **If a calf needed any type of assistance at birth, or lacks a strong suck reflex at 10 minutes old, it should receive a feed - 10% of their bodyweight of good quality colostrum as soon as possible.**
- **1 in 3 calves had drunk insufficient colostrum.**
- **Colostrum supplements vary greatly in quality** (Immucol Platinum being the best currently on the market) so check antibody levels, and don't miss an opportunity to harvest spare colostrum from your own cows.

Thanks to Virbac who sponsored the event and gave an introduction to their new calf scour vaccine which we are now stocking (Bovigen Scour).

Don't forget we're putting on a practical calving course on the 27th February - perfect for new cattle keepers, or for old hands who want to keep up with best practice (see above for more details).



A New Campaign for Commercially Focused EBVs in cattle: 'Shout About The Sire'

New Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) that are linked to the traits that commercial farmers get paid for, such as carcass quality and speed of finishing have been developed and are now available to producers to help with breeding decisions. Using this new data will drive genetic improvement for carcass traits.

In order for a bull to have these EBVs available, **their calves must have sire details recorded on their BCMS passports. Without this information, any data relating to the bull is meaningless as we cannot identify his slaughtered progeny.**

AHDB are now encouraging farmers to share the message and shout about the sire. You can find the new EBVs here <http://egenes.co.uk/carcassdata/>