

# Black Sheep Farm Health

February 2021 Newsletter



## The Field Report

February is one month of winter more than anyone needed - and in 2021 we have the grim accolade of reaching 1 year in some sort of lockdown. Nonetheless, there are reasons for hope. For most of us, there is the real possibility of being able to get out and about after lambing and calving.

In the meantime, we have nothing else to do other than put our heads down and focus on the job in hand. Put the work and planning in now, and save yourself the work putting out fires in the spring! That is the theme for this newsletter, so read on for advice on nutrition and neonatal lamb care.

### Lambing and Calving List: get your orders in!

The 2021 spring supply list is enclosed with this newsletter and bill. If you are unsure about exactly what you might want or need, give us a ring and we can explain the use of each product.

Getting your list back in good time makes life much easier for Hazel and Carole, and makes any delay in getting your order put together much less likely.

### Oral antibiotics at lambing and Orojet update

If you use Orojet at lambing, please note that this treatment is **no longer being manufactured**. Many of you have made great strides in the last few years towards minimising, or even phasing out, the use of oral antibiotics at lambing.

Remember the year-on-year routine use of antibiotics in lambs or calves is unnecessary and strongly discouraged. Under most assurance schemes it is also now prohibited. Orojet user or not, we recommend you spend a few hours \*before\* lambing to review:

- 1. Colostrum management:** All lambs should receive plenty (50ml/kg bodyweight) of colostrum as soon as possible after birth. If a ewe is short of colostrum, the best alternative is spare colostrum harvested from your own vaccinated, non-aborted ewes. If this is not available, artificial colostrum is the next best option but different brands vary greatly in quality so do not hesitate to ask us about which to pick. If many ewes are short of colostrum, this may reflect poor nutrition or disease; again, get in touch if this is the case.
- 2. Hygiene:** Cleanliness is still next to godliness. You should be happy to lie down in your best suit or ball gown in the lambing pens. A combination of clean straw and disinfectant powder (e.g. hydrated lime, Stalosan) will do wonders. If you have the capacity, leave some time for clean pens to dry before re-bedding them. The challenge remains keeping up with this as lambing progresses - hard graft will pay dividends.
- 3. Navel care:** Navels should be dipped (rather than sprayed) with strong iodine (check '10% BP' on bottle) or similar shortly after birth. Navels that fail to dry nicely within 48h of birth suggest issues with dipping or hygiene.



Orojet users - the one remaining licensed treatment for watery mouth is Spectam Scour Halt. Only if infections have been proven to be resistant to this antibiotic can other treatments be prescribed under the 'cascade'. Remember that regardless of antibiotic, routine use in all or most lambs every year will simply lead to resistance.



## Have you had your silage tested? We can help with that...

Silage forms the basis of most suckler cow, and many sheep, rations at calving and lambing. It is a highly variable feed, with many different factors affecting its quality such as dry matter (DM), metabolizable energy (ME), crude protein (CP) and more. **We can take samples while on-farm and submit to the lab (Sciantec) for analysis.**

It varies widely between year, cut, fields and clamps. Without testing you can't know if your ration is adequate, presenting the risks of:

1. Undersupply: leading to calving/lambing issues, poor calf/lamb vigour, poor colostrum supply, retained cleansings, mastitis, increased worm egg shedding, poor maternal behaviour.
2. Oversupply: leading to expensive wastage, calving/lambing issues, poor calf/lamb vigour.

We recommend getting each batch of clamp or bale silage tested. It is easy to do but samples need to be taken in the right way to be truly representative - simply grabbing a handful from a clamp or ring feeder will not suffice and lead to mistakes. If you're unsure about the right technique, just give us a ring, or visit to <https://www.fas.scot/article/silage-sampling-taking-a-representative-sample/>.

The same tests can be used for hay and haylage as well, which also vary like silage.



## Nutrition for Dry Suckler Cows in Late Gestation

Some of you will remember that we (and five client herds) contributed to a University of Edinburgh project in 2018 on dry suckler cow nutrition and failure of passive transfer in suckled calves. Such was the wealth of information generated by the project, it is still being analysed and new conclusions still being realised.

The results were stark, and some were surprising. 988 suckler cows were sampled: **57% of cows sampled had low urea-nitrogen, which indicates a short-term deficiency of protein; 35.4% of cows samples had high NEFA results, which indicates a short term deficiency of energy.**

Body condition is a great place to start - spring calving cows should be 'fit not fat' i.e. 2.5-3.0/5.0 - at calving - BUT if cows are over-conditioned, late pregnancy is not the right time to be stripping weight off them. This will simply lead to lean cows with little colostrum having big calves. Another finding of the study was that **lean cows (<2.5/5.0) were nearly twice as likely to require assistance at calving** than cows in the ideal body condition.

Late pregnancy and lactation represents a significant gear change in demands on the suckler cow. If you're unsure how well they are coping, **a simple blood test indicates how well the ration is providing them with energy and protein.** A deficiency in either or both will reduce the volume of colostrum produced by the cow, and so raise the risk of calf mortality. Cows should have been on the ration for at least 2 weeks, and the group should be sampled within the fortnight before the start of calving.

On the cow side, we can safely say that **feeding suckler cows the same ration throughout pregnancy will lead to issues.** Either they will do well early on, leading to overcondition and associated calving issues, or they will suffer in late pregnancy leading to calving and colostrum issues. It is not uncommon for both to occur.

Trace elements, such as iodine, copper and selenium, can be supplied by bolus or in-feed minerals. This should be provided only if a deficiency has been identified historically. These can be tested for at the same time as energy and protein.

## Weaning Weight Competition 2020/21: FREE HIRE OF WEIGH SCALES

If you have already weaned your calves, or are about to wean, do not forget to submit your results to Kaz ([kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk](mailto:kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk)) if you want to be entered for the weaning weight competition. First prize has yet to be decided but last year's was a bottle of Hepple Gin!

Remember the BSFH weigh scales are **free to hire for clients at any time of the year** - just ring us to book them out. For two of the categories we will need cow weights as well.

