

# Black Sheep Farm Health

February 2022 Newsletter



## The Field Report

Plenty to pack in this month—just like January this is the time to lay foundations for the year ahead, with regard to fertility, nutrition and infectious disease. Read on for more...

### Get tough on sheep scab and abortion - and save £££ on testing.

As discussed in last month's newsletter, this is a very useful time of year to blood test sheep to find sheep scab which perhaps hasn't reared its head as clinical cases (yet). If you missed that and want more information, have a look at the previous newsletter or just give one of the vets a ring!

We understand farmers are busy people and so we are always fans of combining tasks and tests: plus there is now **subsidised testing for infectious causes of ovine abortion—specifically toxoplasma and enzootic abortion. In these cases the lab fees are paid for**, with just consumables and postage to pay plus the usual time and visit if not on a plan. Certain other tests if required (e.g. Border disease, trace elements status) can be run on samples taken at the same time.

Clearing up your disease and nutrition status at this early stage of the year will set you up nicely for lambing and beyond! Feel to get in touch and discuss.

### AHDB Monitor Farm Event: The Data Dilemma, Alnham Farm, 10:00 - 13:00, 23rd February

If you want to learn about and support a local farm and their systems, this is for you! AHDB Blurb below...

With nearly 3000 ewes split across three flocks, 220 spring calving cows and business objectives that include targets in both technical and financial performance, the team at Alnham acknowledge how important it is to record and utilise the 'optimum' amount of animal performance data. We will look at how much data is too much and how we can utilise data better. We will also discuss equipment and whether it is effective in driving profitability and supporting key business decisions. They will also share their top tips on body condition scoring ewes pre-lambing and preparing store cattle turnout onto pasture. What we will cover:

- How to capture animal performance data and how best to use it
- What technology and software is available
- What the key benefits are of using EID technology
- Why body condition scoring is important and how to best use the data
- How to maximise cattle growth rates from pasture at turnout.



There will be live demonstrations available to watch. Please wear appropriate footwear and warm clothing. You can register for your free place by booking online, emailing [KE.events@ahdb.org.uk](mailto:KE.events@ahdb.org.uk) or calling 01904 771218. Attendees must be over 16 years of age. Hot food and refreshments will be served at 10am prompt but no lunch will be provided. This is subject to the Covid restrictions applicable at the time of the event.



### Collie Pups Available

Farm bred, bare skinned dogs & bitches. Both parents strong working dogs. Micro chipped & first vaccination. Ready end of February. Tel: Tim or Anne Robson 01830 520332. Evenings best.



## Increasing calves weaned and reducing scours/navel ill/joint ill

### Metabolic profiling suckler cows (Charlotte Beane, final year, Edinburgh)

Metabolic profiling means taking blood samples from a few animals in a group to check how well their diet is working for them. Unlike feed analysis, which looks at levels of energy, protein and minerals in the feed, metabolic profiling looks at how much of this energy, protein and mineral is actually getting into the cows.

**What can it tell you?** Metabolic profiling is mostly used to assess nutrition but it can sometimes flag up diseases that may be hiding in a herd. It can assess how well the recent ration has been working but also the longer-term nutrition of the cows. Markers in the blood can tell us about energy, protein, minerals (such as Phosphate and Magnesium) and trace elements (such as Copper and Selenium).

**Why is this useful?** Getting nutrition right is key to achieving a profitable suckler enterprise and maximising the number of calves weaned per cow. But even with regular body condition scoring and ration analysis, it can be hard to tell what's going on inside the cows. In a study the practice contributed data to, of 988 suckler cows sampled, **57% were low on protein and 35% were short on energy in the short time.** Nutritional imbalances can result in problems around calving including **slow and difficult calvings, slow cleansings and cows taking longer to get back in calf next season.** They can also lead to poorer quality colostrum and less milk production, meaning **more sick calves and slower growth rates.** Some deficiencies may even lead to big losses, such as low magnesium causing grass staggers.

**How cows should be metabolically profiled?** Not every cow in the herd needs to be sampled- choosing at least 5 animals per group that are representative and generally healthy is enough to assess how well the ration is working. We can help you choose which animals would be best. We will also collect some information on the day about the cows we have sampled, such as calving date and the ration they are fed. One set of samples should be taken 2-3 weeks before calving and another 2-3 weeks after calving. You must wait at least 2 weeks after changing a ration before you can blood sample to see how well it is providing for the cows

### Life after Spectam: Act Now

Many of you will by now have heard that 'Spectam Scour Halt' - the only licensed oral antibiotic for lambs following the withdrawal of 'Orojet' last year - is in short supply this year and is being delisted by its manufacturer. Where does this leave users? We have a reduced allocation for 2022 which has been divided up along last year's lines. But looking forward, there will be none available next year. In any case, for some time now, we have been unable to sign off any farm assurance paperwork which testifies that lambs have been receiving blanket treatment. As ever, getting the fundamentals right will preclude the need for these products, especially:

- **Ewe Nutrition:** Monitoring body condition and ensuring ewes have adequate protein and energy for the stressful final third of pregnancy when they are growing a lamb and developing colostrum.
- **Hygiene:** Both environmental and navel hygiene - keeping pens dry and dipping navels religiously.
- **Colostrum Management:** Make sure each lamb - especially those at higher risk e.g. triplets, lambs from gimmers, assisted lambings - get enough colostrum. Colostrum is the best 'blanket treatment' you can give.
- **Stockmanship:** Attention to detail is key to all of the above, as is making sure there are enough labour units to stock units. Consider taking on a lambing assistant or vet student if you find yourself short on time.

During transition or for exceptional cases, where there has been a breakdown in nutrition, labour or hygiene, products may be prescribed under the cascade system. But we should be clear - **the writing is on the wall for these products and systems that rely on treating every lamb.** It is certainly possible to make the required changes with minimal or no adverse effect on lamb welfare or farm economics, as many of you have already demonstrated. Better to make start making changes now, step-by-step, rather than eventually being forced to go cold turkey. We are here to help!

