Black Sheep Farm Health

January 2022 Newsletter

The Field Report

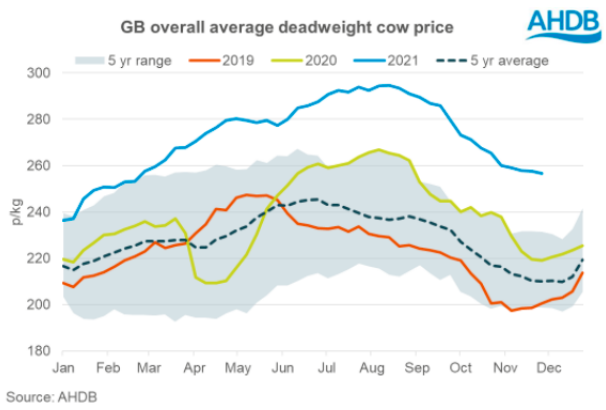
Like you, we are hitting the ground running in 2022. Despite the cliché, January is often a good time to reflect on the year gone by in a livestock enterprise. Darker afternoons are the perfect opportunity to gather data and critically assess - we are here to help with that. You will have noticed we recently went on a recruitment drive, more on that over the next couple of months…

Don't forget PD'ing

Housing, feeding and bedding suckler cows over winter is **the** major cost for UK suckler cow enterprises.

If a cow is empty, she will still take as up much space, eat as much, and crap as much as an in-calf cow.

The cow price may be back on the summer peak but is still well above the 5-year average.



Get them PD'd, save on inputs, cash them in.

Stay vigilant for pneumonia

The end to 2021 - humid and mild - was perfect pneumonia weather for housed calves.

Pneumonia vaccines are important tools in managing pneumonia risk but if other factors are working against calves - nutrition, weaning stress, poor ventilation - they will not be sufficient to prevent cases of pneumonia. Often fixes are relatively straightforward e.g. uncapping shed ridges, supplementing a little protein, et cetera.

If you get more than a couple of cases, don't hesitate to call us to investigate them; there is probably more we can do. Annually treating calves for pneumonia need not be the norm.

BVD Check Testing Time

It is well established that BVD causes significant fertility and calf health issues in herds where it is already present, and is a disaster when introduced into a previously unexposed herd. **Leaving a suckler herd exposed to BVD is inviting an expensive headache.** We were encouraged by the excellent uptake of the 'BVD: Stamp It Out' funding and would encourage everyone to keep the momentum going.

Additionally, since recent standard changes Red Tractor producers '**will be asked how they are taking action to eradicate bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD).** This needs to be documented in a health plan and implemented.'

Although the BVD vaccines are very effective when used correctly, **they cannot eliminate BVD from a herd unless used in conjunction with testing**. This is due to an unusual feature of BVD - the existence of Persistently Infected (PI) animals.

Knowing and (vitally) **monitoring BVD status is critical to maintaining suckler cow fertility and calf survival.** This is where either the (i) Tissue tag or (ii) Youngstock blood testing come in.

We often find the latter, also known as 'check testing', to be more practical and more economical, as it requires 5-10 calves from each management cohort to provide an indication of BVD exposure. Tissue tags are often more appropriate for AYR calving dairy herds.

Calves should be 9-18m and not vaccinated - so **now, before lambing and calving, is a great time to collect samples from the Spring 2021 calf crop.** Just get in touch with the practice to organise your test, which could be combined with a sheep scab blood test at scanning (see overleaf).

Each management group should be tested separately - on many farms this may consist of the spring calving group and the autumn calving group.

Routine testing can contribute to accreditation, which could well be useful if selling replacements, or selling any cattle to Scotland. Cattle from CHeCS-accredited English herds do not need to be tested pre-sale (unlike non-accredited cattle, which would require individual testing).

How does your medicine use compare to the national average? Find out with Medicines Hub

Ever wondered how your medicines use compared to other similar farms?

UK farms already have among the lowest use of antibiotics in Europe. But while pig, poultry and aquaculture sectors capture antibiotic data for over 90 per cent of production, the large and complex dairy, beef and sheep sectors have struggled to evidence responsible use due to lack of this type of national-level data.

The industry-led Medicine Hub – developed by AHDB – plans to address this. With unprecedented farm-to-fork support, it offers a safe, secure and independent central repository to collate, report and compare antibiotic data from a variety of sources, including on-farm farm use and datasets from vets and processors.

AHDB MEDICINEHUB

The Medicines Hub is free to use. If you grant it permission, it will share the medicines data with the practice, which would make discussions on flock or herd health more relevant and focussed.

Although there is no requirement under farm assurance to submit data online for cattle and sheep farmers (although there is for pigs farmers), it can function as an electronic medicines book. It can generate medicine use reports to comply with the relevant assurance schemes.

If you're unsure about how to start using the Medicines Hub, don't hesitate to give us a ring .

Make use of the sheep scab blood test at scanning

Contrary to popular belief, sheep do not have to be itchy to be carrying sheep scab. Indeed there appears to be significant breed differences in the severity of clinical signs. Sheep scab can rumble away only to rear its head at the most inconvenient time - lambing, for example, or during the summer when treatment withdrawals make selling lambs complicated.

Almost all sheep enterprises will be at risk of sheep scab. Anyone with sheep neighbours, anyone who shares tups or equipment, anyone who uses contractors and anyone who buys live sheep is at risk of scab. The development of sheep scab that are resistant to the clear injectable worming products (e.g 'Cydectin' and 'Dectomax') has made it more difficult to practically treat purchased sheep effectively.

The advent of a blood test - which looks for recent exposure to sheep scab - has given us a very useful tool to detect sheep scab at an early stage. 12 sheep from each group - say per hill, or 12 each from the in-bye and the hill, are blood tested. We think that for most sheep farms this would be a worthwhile exercise, and the most practical time to sample would be scanning because:

1. The sheep are already gathered.
2. Scab requires every single sheep to be treated. Typically there are fewest sheep present at this stage of the farming calendar.
3. Few or no lambs to sell compared to the summer, therefore treatment withdrawals less of an issue.
4. Ewes can still be safely treated at this stage following a positive result using a cage dipper.

When dipping was routine in the 20th century, sheep scab was eradicated from the UK (and nearly eradicated twice before liberalisation of dipping rules). A compulsory return to dipping seems unlikely, but if testing (followed by treatment if necessary) were to become routine, this would go a long way to beating back this costly and miserable disease.

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