

# Black Sheep Farm Health

July 2021 Newsletter



## The Field Report

What a combination sun and a bit of rain can be. It is great to see silage coming in in good time. With the bulls going out, and you lot on tractors or shearing sheep, our caseload eases off until autumn calving starts.

We try to find jobs to keep us off street corners though. Read on for details of the next medicines course, our suggestion that this is a great time to do some health planning, and **keep your eyes peeled for a social evening in August - more details to follow...**

### Date for your Diary: Mastering Medicines course

2nd September, 18:00—20:00, @BSFH Rothbury.  
£40 ex. VAT

*Certificates and refreshment provided. Lively discussion guaranteed.*

Either ring the practice at 01669 838 288, or email [kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk](mailto:kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk), to book your place.



Although there was a hiatus of these courses with COVID, between 2018-2019 we were really impressed with the demand for them, approaching 100 attendees. Likewise, the engagement and discussions during the sessions has been fantastic.

### Cool Bag Amnesty

As ever in the warm weather, our cool bag stock is running low. No doubt some are in footwells of pickups or on top of medicines cabinets waiting to come home.

Kaz has promised a biscuit per cool bag returned!

### Health Plans - this is a good time to update them!

With the spring rush on livestock work now over, this is an ideal time to assess what went well over the past year, and what could be improved.

Most assurance schemes now specify an annually updated health plan written in conjunction with your vet, which may incorporate aspects such as an antibiotic review or justifications for some husbandry practices.

Having said that, we find the vast majority of you understand (i) the value of reflecting and planning on animal health and productivity beyond a tick box for the assurance inspector, and (ii) you get out what you put in to this sort of exercise. There is always something new to consider - a novel tool to manage disease, new funding to tackle a certain infection et cetera.

We can be flexible: if the weather is good and you need to be on a tractor we can reschedule. Likewise, we can do the sessions outside at work or on-farm, or inside in a distanced manner. Just ring the office on 01669 838 288 to organise a session with one of the vets.

### Fly Control in Cattle

Although cattle rarely suffer with flies as badly as sheep, they can still cause significant issues. Not only will they bother cattle and reduce time grazing, but they can carry two significant bacterial infections:

- 'New Forest Eye' is an infection of the eye which causes weeping, spasm and ulceration. This is a very painful condition and can sweep through a naïve herd. Flies are responsible for transmission.
- 'Summer mastitis' or 'Dry cow mastitis' is another bacterial infection carried between cows by flies; even heifers yet to calve can be affected. This causes a severe mastitis which can wipe out a quarter or more.

Neither of these conditions have (in this country) specific prevention measures except the control of flies. There are various pour-on or spot-on products available; to discuss which, if any, may be best for your herd, just ring up one of the vets.

In addition, 'fly tags' impregnated with repellent are used on some farms. Some others find the use of garlic-containing lick buckets useful. There are even companies that provide the larvae of parasitic wasps which predate flies and so reduce their numbers, although in the UK they are mainly used in dairy cattle.



## Earn a donation for Farming Community Network while sitting down

See below a message from Beth Clark of the FIELD Project. You could even do this while sitting on a tractor!

'Are you a sheep or cattle farmer in the North of England?

We need your expertise to help develop better understandings of endemic livestock disease. We are a Wellcome Trust funded research project aiming to help tackle endemic diseases in the UK's cattle and sheep population. As part of the project we are bringing together small groups of farmers online, via Zoom, to discuss and reflect on the question "**Why do lameness and Bovine Viral Diarrhoea persist?**" Participation will involve joining two online meetings, the first focusing on past experiences of these diseases, the second thinking about how we can deal with them better in the future'.



Each meeting will last no longer than 90 minutes and will be held online. We aim to hold the first meeting in July/August and the second meeting in August/September. We will make a £15 donation to the Farming Community Network charity for each participant (<https://fcn.org.uk/>).

If you'd like to take part or have any questions, please contact Dr Beth Clark at Newcastle University [beth.clark@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:beth.clark@ncl.ac.uk) or on 07833601744. More information on the research and what taking part will involve can be found on the FIELD project website. '

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## Why take your bull out after nine weeks?

The target bulling period for cows and heifers is typically nine and six weeks respectively. Industry averages are significantly longer than this. If you calve over an extended period, what would you stand to gain by tightening the bulling and therefore calving pattern?

- 1. Better long term fertility:** Over several years, by only retaining the cows that reliably give a calf every year at the start of calving, you select for fertile resilient cows. Having only a 6 week bulling period for the heifers accelerates this progress. Generally the bulling period is shortened gradually e.g. to 14 weeks in year one, 12 weeks in year two and 10 weeks in year three, and so on. Nonetheless you could go the whole hog in year one in the knowledge there could be a few more empty cows.
- 2. More effective use of medicines:** Pre-calving treatments only work well for a given period; e.g. calf scour vaccines are licensed for use between 3-12 weeks pre-calving; therefore if calving extends beyond 9 weeks the effectiveness of this vaccine will fall. Cows/calves will be more susceptible to conditions you may have already paid £££ to prevent.
- 3. Reduced rates of calf disease:** As well as reduced efficacy of medicines as above, many calf conditions become more prevalent later in the calving period because hygiene inevitably starts to falter. By cutting calving off at an earlier date, you avoid those later calves born into a dirtier environment.
- 4. More effective use of trace element treatments:** Pre-calving injections or boluses, like medicines, will start to wane in effectiveness if they are given long before the cow actually calves.
- 5. More effective use of calving nutrition:** Cattle generally benefit from a higher quality ration in the weeks preceding calving. The timing of this will be very different if some cows calve much later than the rest. This ends up being an expensive way to put excessive condition on cows, and to generate more assisted calvings (see below).
- 6. Fewer assisted calvings:** Late calving cows typically have had a much longer period on a generous ration - even if that is spring grass. Putting on excessive condition before calving increases the risk of cows getting into calving difficulties. Considering the small % of cows actually calving in June we do plenty of c-sections that month!
- 7. Bigger and more uniform calves:** Having more evenly-aged calves, distributed towards the start of calving, gives you older and therefore heavier calves at weaning. This sets them and you up well for the next stage.
- 8. Lower risk of chance calvers:** If the bull lingers in with the cows, there is the risk that he may serve the older heifer calves. This may seem unlikely but we have some every year calving at 14-17 months. Inevitably this requires expensive assistance and puts the heifer's development at risk.
- 9. Better use of staff time:** Staff tied up watching, feeding and calving cows can always be doing other jobs!
- 10. Better use of your time:** Likewise, the straggling late calvers take up a disproportionate amount of your time to look and feed. That time could be spent on other jobs, drinking coffee, watching the Euros etc etc...