

# Black Sheep Farm Health

July 2018 Newsletter



## The Field Report

Summer is well and truly here. As the 'fire-fighting' work which kept us occupied during the spring dies down, we have been out and about getting health plans updated and written up.

July and August generally forms a natural lull in the beef and sheep calendar - although those of you making silage might disagree. It is a convenient time of year to start considering what went well and what might be worth changing for next year. We are always on the end of a phone to discuss potential changes to livestock management - I'm afraid we can't do anything about the weather though.

Back at base, we have a World Cup sweepstake running. However, there are rumours of corruption worthy of FIFA as Carole managed to draw Argentina, Brazil and France(?) - did Hazel take a backhander? None of us are brave enough to ask...

## Health Planning—is yours up to date?

The recent farm assurance changes have made it **a requirement that health plans be updated by a vet annually for Red Tractor producers.**

As with most planning, you get out of a health plan what you put in. An annual review means keeping on top of production data and being able to stay ahead of the curve. These plans now also have to audit the use of antibiotics.

We encourage you to update your plan at this time of year anyway, as it's normally a bit quieter than usual. The calving and lambing season are also fresh in the mind, and changes can be made in plenty of time.

Another change to the Red Tractor standards is a recommendation that at least one person giving drugs to livestock should go on an appropriate course — we're running these through the summer and there are more details overleaf.

## Silage: A Veterinary Viewpoint

At this time of year, the practice phones can take on an eerie silence, especially on sunny days. As a profession, we're often willing to point out stemmy or spoiled bales in the wintertime. At that point there isn't much we can do apart from recommend getting some better forage in and treat cases of diseases associated with below-par forage.

While silaging mostly remains a dark art to us, we've compiled a veterinary wishlist with animal health and productivity in mind.

- **Minimise soil contamination** (ash) as much as possible. Practically this means lifting the mower slightly - although yield is slightly less the aftermath grows back much quicker. Soil is home to clostridial bacteria which cause a range of diseases including black leg. Listeria - the bacterium responsible for silage eye, as well as abortion and neurological disease - also thrives in soil-contaminated silage.
- On clamps, **avoid using tyres**. The wire in tyres frequently escapes into silage, causing hardware disease (a peritonitis that progresses to a fatal abscess in the chest). You can also get a clingfilm type layer that sits beneath the top sheet, reducing spoilage of the outermost tonnes.
- For bales, **don't skimp on sheet layers**. You can also use last year's plastic as a cushion to lay bales on, reducing the chance of stones puncturing the lower bales.
- **Keep silage free of junk** such as plastic or string which can easily find its way into feeders and then livestock.
- **Silage that looks or smells bad, probably is bad and shouldn't be fed to cattle or sheep**. Silage is often foul-smelling, very dark or visibly spoiled with fungal growth (white spoilage). Do not feed this to cattle or sheep, especially if they are pregnant. Bad silage can cause late term abortion and brain disease.
- **It is important leftovers are cleared before adding more silage to feeders**. Even a small amount of wastage will accumulate, spoil and cause a host of problems.
- To avoid sorting, while maintaining rumen 'scratch factor', keep the **chop length less than 8cm, and ideally 2-4cm**. (continued overleaf)



It is important at this stage to mark which bales are from which cuts/fields. Access to each cut is key too, so that you have the choice of silage when you need it. There is no point in doing silage analysis in September if you can't access the best quality forage when you need it.

Consider how different cuts may be more appropriate for different stock: fast growing calves and cows or sheep in the final third of pregnancy require the best of what you have, while dry or early-pregnancy suckler cows can get by on much less energy and protein.



Ultimately the best way to assess the adequacy of a ration is to 'ask the animal' - monitor body condition and take bloods for metabolic profiles in the critical late pregnancy period. In cattle, bloods are taken in the last month of pregnancy, often at the same time as using a scour vaccine such as 'Rotavec' and bolusing. In sheep, bloods are taken 6 weeks pre-lambing across different groups (singles, twins and triplets).

This year we collaborated with the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies in Edinburgh to measure silage quality, suckler cow nutrition and colostrum transfer in calves. There will be more on this in the coming months. However it became clear there was a great range in silage quality, and that most were not high enough in ME or CP to be fed alone to cows in late pregnancy. This was reflected in the energy and protein status of most of the cows.

## Dates for your Diary

**Innovis Open Day with Hedgeley Farms and Joe Henry:** 6th July 14:00-18:00

Open day with Hedgeley Farms in Alnwick, Northumberland and Innovis. Joe will be discussing the use of farm data to increase farm profit.

**Mastering Medicines course:** 4th September 18:00-20:00.

£40 ex.VAT, includes dinner and certificate of attendance. The course is appropriate for the new Red Tractor recommendation, but will be a useful refresher even for seasoned stockkeepers.

## Product news: Toxovax

Tupping may seem a distant prospect, but give some thought to your Toxovax requirements this year. As the vaccine needs to be used within a week of being made, it is prone to supply issues. To manage demand, MSD Animal Health are putting a new ordering system in place. As an incentive, **the vaccine will be discounted if it is purchased and collected by the end of August.**

Let us know as soon as you can the:

- **number of doses needed** and
- **date you need them**

Ring the practice on 01669 838 288 to leave your details and secure your batch!

Toxovax should be given as a single dose between **12 and 3 weeks before tupping**. Ewe lambs can be vaccinated from 5 months of age.

If you're unsure how Toxoplasma might be affecting your flock it typically causes a **high barren rate** (which should be less than 2%), which gradually creeps up over several years. **We are here to discuss it with you and there is free testing available through us until the end of July.**

