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NEWSLETTER



Black Sheep Farm Health
Dedicated farm vets

Showing Sheep this Summer?

It is important to be mindful of the risks that showing sheep can pose to the health of your flock and take steps to mitigate these risks.



For animals that will be attending multiple shows through the season, full quarantine after every return to farm is often not feasible, so we would recommend that these animals are kept completely separate from the rest of the flock for the duration of the show season, ideally housed or on 'dirty ground'.

This ground should not be grazed by the rest of the flock after this time, and cattle or cropping could be used to 'clean' the pasture.

Quarantined sheep should have no contact with the rest of the flock, and should not use the same equipment, handling systems or waterproofs.

Following the last show of the season, these animals should undergo full quarantine procedures before being integrated back into the flock. Alternatively, and to better control the disease risk, show animals could be culled from commercial flocks.

Exemption from standstill

Animals being transported to and from shows are exempt from the standstill rules, provided they are kept separate from non-show livestock in an APHA-approved isolation facility, for 6 days prior to movement to the show, and for 6 days after return. Isolated animals may move to another show within those 6 days. Ask one of the vets about this.

Benefits of Scanning Cows Earlier

Thank you to vet student, Tally McGowan, from Edinburgh Vet School for contributing to the newsletter!

Earlier pregnancy scanning in a beef herd can improve efficiency of a herd and inform management in later pregnancy.

Scanning cows 6 weeks after the bull has been removed will allow better identification of twin pregnancies and, at this stage, pregnancies can be more accurately aged. Having a better idea of when calves are due is beneficial as it allows management of feed, housing and labour requirements to fit around expected calving dates.

Earlier scanning also allows for earlier detection of geld cows to avoid carrying passengers, and therefore reduces costs.

Teaser Time!

Teasers, or vasectomised tups, synchronise ewe cyclicity and tighten lambing periods.

For most effective use of a teaser:

- Select a homebred, well grown, sexually mature shearling with good feet and teeth as a teaser.
- Consider a different breed to the stock rams so the teaser is easy to identify.
- Get teaser vasectomised at least 6 weeks before intended use.
- Introduce teaser to ewes at a ratio of no more than 1:100.
- Provide greater 'ram power' at tupping – ie as a greater proportion of the ewes will be cycling together, a greater tup to ewe ratio is suggested– 1:30.
- Replace teasers every 2-3 years; their effectiveness declines over time.

Frustrated by poor tag retention?

Particularly while TB testing, we often witness frustrations over poor tag retention. The average tag replacement rate in adult beef cattle is just over 4% per year, but there is massive variation between farms and stock types.

What steps can we take to improve tag retention in cattle?

1. Use the correct tag and tag applicator when tagging animals, ensuring that the tag is clean and the applicator is working effectively.
2. Follow the tag manufacturers guidance when applying tags to ensure correct tag placement in the animal's ear.

The tag should be inserted in the middle one-third of the ear. You should be able to see two large veins in the ear, and the tag should be inserted between these.

Avoid piercing cartilage ridges as this may result in ear deformities and infection.

Ear tags placed too close to the animals head will fit too tightly due to the thicker cartilage whereas tags placed too far towards the top or bottom of the ear can be easily ripped out.

When using plastic tags, the female part should be on the inside/front of the ear with the male part entering from the back of the ear.

Once tag is placed, check that the tag is correctly inserted and can move freely around with the tag in a downwards position.



An incorrectly applied tag;
female part of tag applied to
the **back** of the ear



A correctly applied tag;
female part of tag applied to
the **front** of the ear

3. Ensure animals are suitably restrained when applying ear tags.
4. Keep a note of tag loss rates in the herd over time and specifically fields and sheds where higher rates of tag loss occur to help identify reasons for losses.
5. Feedback ear tag loss rates to tag manufacturers.

These same principles for improving tag retention apply to sheep tags too.

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