

Black Sheep Farm Health

June 2022 Newsletter



The Field Report

With the sheds starting to empty it feels like summer is just around the corner!

Mastering Medicines Course

Wednesday 22nd June, 18:00—20:00, @BSFH Rothbury. £40 ex. VAT. Certificates and refreshment provided. Lively discussion guaranteed. This course is a requirement for Red Tractor.

Either ring the practice at 01669 838 288, or email kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk, to book your place.

Free Hats

We are running low on cool bags again! If you have any we would appreciate you returning them. Anyone who returns a cool bag in June will get a free hat!

Email Invoices

If you would like to start receiving your invoice by email please call the office or email hazel.scott@bsfh.co.uk to let us know.

Cow Lifter

We have recently bought a cow lifter that can be borrowed from the practice. Please get in touch if you would like to borrow it for a downer cow.

Rock Salt In Cattle

Many forages and cereals are low in sodium which is a key mineral to ensure correct water intake and to reduce the risk of acidosis and staggers. Clinical signs of a salt deficiency include eating abnormal substances (Pica) which contain salt (e.g. drinking urine, licking sweat or gate posts), reduced growth and weight loss.

Salt should be offered ad lib to all cattle from weaning, with the exception of dry cows. Cattle will regulate their own intake and only consume what they require.

When Cows Eat Things They Shouldn't

Pica is a condition where cattle eat abnormal items with no nutritional value (stones, plastic, soil etc.). The presence of pica means that something is lacking from the diet and further investigation should be undertaken to try and identify the cause. The most common causes of pica in cattle are lack of sodium (salt), phosphorus or structural fibre. Pica is often diagnosed at this time of year due to several factors increasing the risk of these conditions.

Low sodium (also discussed above) is often seen in early summer as pasture is often lower in sodium at this time and application of potassium fertilisers or slurry increases the risk of low sodium. Often reviewing mineral status of forage and blood samples as well as considering giving access to rock salt is a good first step in situations when sodium could be contributing to the problem.

Another cause of pica is low fibre. Fibre is important for good rumen health and function and peak grass growth in early summer often leads to leafy forage that is low in fibre. In cases of pica caused by low fibre cattle often have very loose and bubbly dung. When fibre is thought to contribute to pica straw should be offered to see if this improves the situation.

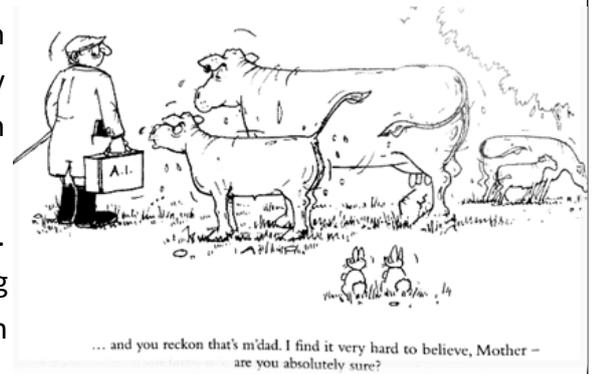
The last common cause of pica is low phosphorus. In cases when other alterations are not making a difference, blood tests can be undertaken to determine if cows have low phosphorus. Grass can be low in phosphorus at this time of year. It can be hard to supplement phosphorus and it will take a couple of weeks to see improvements.



The Benefits of Artificial Insemination

The use of Artificial Insemination (AI) in beef animals is often underutilised but can give many benefits to the beef herd, particularly when used as part of a synchronisation protocol allowing insemination at a fixed time. These benefits include:-

1. Increases the number of opportunities cows have to get in calf. With the first service occurring on day one of the breeding season cows have the maximum opportunity to be serviced in the breeding window.
2. By tightening the calving period we can produce a more even batch of calves with higher calf weights at weaning. This allows increased weight at market, allows replacement heifers more time to reach target weight before service, reduces disease pressures caused by mixing animals of different ages and also allows vaccinations and other treatments to be given at the right time.
3. Improves genetic selection – Bulls can be selected to fit your herd and even individual cows allowing access to a wider range of genetics as well as top quality genetics that would be too costly to purchase as stock bulls. It also enables the extension of a bull's lifespan in the herd as AI can be used in heifers with bulls external to the herd. The use of AI enables maternal traits to be improved for breeding replacements while stock bulls can retain more terminal characteristics suiting finishing animals.
4. Time saving as only requires 2 handlings for synchronisation and one handling for AI, which is timed so removes the requirement for heat detection. Further services can be completed by a sweeper bull.



Animals that are presented for synchronisation should have calved at least 30 days prior, should be in appropriate BCS (body condition score) and generally healthy (up to date with vaccinations, trace element supplementation etc.). They should be kept in consistent management groups for a month prior and post service and during this time should be on a rising plane of nutrition.

If you are interested in finding out more about our AI programme get in touch with Jack. Our AI service includes all timings calculated to suit both us and you as well as advice around sire selection based on EBVs (estimated breeding values).

Fly Control

As the weather warms (hopefully!) we will see an increase in flies present. Fly control is important as their annoyance to animals can significantly reduce growth and production and they can also act as a vector for other conditions such as pink eye and summer mastitis.

In cattle flies are generally controlled by use of synthetic pyrethroid products (Deltamethrin or Cypermethrin) either as a spot on, pour on or even in an ear tag. Environmental and stock management options should also be considered such as avoiding grazing highest risk areas where possible (wet, low lying fields particularly near woodlands) and reducing fly breeding grounds (e.g. stagnant water, waste silage, ensuring muck heaps are away from grazing stock). There are also alternative options to reduce fly populations such as parasitic wasps.

