

Black Sheep Farm Health

March 2022 Newsletter



The Field Report

Spring is definitely here - calvings, prolapses and c-sections have all been trickling in. For many of you the rush is yet to come, and if there are any last minute preparations to make, don't hesitate to get in touch. Otherwise, we look forward to seeing you over the next few months, though hopefully not too many of you, and not too often! Let the good times roll...

Farm-assured? Have you completed a medicines handling and administration course? Don't be caught out

Nearly 100 people have attended one of our 'Mastering Medicines' courses since 2018, and >95% have given very positive feedback, taking away something they can put into practice the very next day.

As of November 2021, the Red Tractor recommendation that someone on-farm has attended a medicines handling course became a requirement. We've had reports of inspectors emphasising and enforcing this point since this change came into play.

Kaz is putting together a course this month— although no date is set yet: if you're interested, get in touch on 07557092760.

Lambing and Calving orders - form attached

Don't miss out on filling in your lambing and calving orders. If you get a paper copy the blank form should be in with this month's bill and newsletter. If you get an emailed bill, it will be attached in the same email.

Once completed, hand these in, or message them to the office, and Hazel and Carole will have the kit ready and waiting for you!

Any questions about various products? Don't hesitate to get in touch.

Ringwomb? There's a jag for that...

The causes of ringwomb in cattle and sheep are many, and it's a poorly understood condition. It is also a frustrating one, and a common reason for us being called to a lambing or calving.

In the last couple of years a new drug 'Sensiblex' has been available which, although not effective in 100% cases, can be very helpful even if given while we're on our way. A bottle, or even a couple of doses in syringes, may well be a worthwhile investment this lambing!



Free Schmallenberg Virus (SBV) Testing

Following confirmed cases in Aberdeenshire, SAC are now offering free testing on suspicious cases of stillborn calves and lambs. Typically, the signs of Schmallenberg infection are deformed lambs and calves.



Specifically, the most common deformities are::

- **Arthrogryposis** (limbs fixed in position) of varying severities, which is usually associated with narrowing of the spinal cord.
- **Twisting of the vertebral column** at various sites which may include the neck.
- **Small brains** including small cerebellum

We would recommend the investigation of multiple abortions in any case - but if lambs/calves are suspect for Schmallenberg, don't hesitate to get in touch and we can organise some testing.

SBV associated malformations can occur when infection occurs between day 28-56 of pregnancy in sheep and day 80-150 in cattle. The active midge period in the UK ended on the 23rd November 2021. While it is not warm enough for newly infected midges to establish a mature (infectious) viral when temperatures drop below 12C, any midges carrying mature infections from earlier in the season would remain infectious at this time. Housing of animals can increase transmission where infected local populations can maintain themselves in the warmer temperatures and shelter of sheds and polytunnels. SAC expect that cases could still occur as we get into the main calving and lambing seasons but will be localised and sporadic rather than widespread. They also expect that SBV seroprevalence in the Scottish sheep and cattle populations is low.



#ColostrumIsGold

Key Points

- **Lambs need sufficient volume of colostrum, of sufficient quality, as soon as possible.**
- **Keep oral antibiotics only for when you need them; this will preserve effectiveness and save money.**
- **By far the best replacement for a ewe's colostrum is that of another healthy ewe on the same farm.**

Colostrum management of lambs at birth is essential for the prevention of disease and giving lambs the best start in life. Good colostrum management of lambs along with good lambing hygiene should not only increase lamb vitality, but also reduce the need for antibiotics against such as watery mouth. Many farms should be able to reduce dependence on oral doses in this way, some to zero. The farming industry is committed to reducing its antibiotic usage and selecting only at-risk lambs for treatment with antibiotics is one way of reducing usage."

Lambs at high risk of watery mouth are:

- Triplet or low birthweight lambs
- Lambs from a poor body condition ewe
- Born into a dirty environment: typically later in lambing period

Colostrum is all about the Q's:

Quickness – Both the quality of colostrum and the ability of the lambs to absorb antibody declines rapidly in the first 24 hours after lambing. The sooner the lamb gets its quota of colostrum, the better.

Quantity – Lambs need 50ml/kg of good quality colostrum as soon as possible and 200ml/kg within the first 24 hours. For an average 4kg lamb this equates to 200mls for its first feed. Small lambs, and those lambing outside, require more colostrum to keep warm.

Quality – Concentration of antibodies and fat content is essential when looking at the quality of colostrum. Quality of ewe's colostrum can be affected by: nutrition, vaccination of ewes, number of lambs carried, disease in the ewe around lambing, and breed e.g. Suffolk colostrum has a lower per cent fat than Blackface colostrum. Production of good quality colostrum in ewes is centred around protein intake in the two weeks before lambing. A rough feeding guide is for ewes to receive 100g per fetus per day of Digestible Undegraded Protein (DUP) such as soya for the two weeks leading up to lambing.

When a ewe's colostrum is unavailable or inadequate, surplus colostrum from another ewe on the farm is the gold standard. Avoid ewes that have aborted their lambs to limit potential spread of disease. Harvest colostrum as soon as possible after lambing and hygienically – ideally wear gloves, use clean containers and avoid harvesting straw and muck at the same time – into convenient volumes. This can then either be refrigerated for up to one week, or frozen at -18°C for up to one year. Do not microwave frozen colostrum to reheat it as this breaks down proteins, including the vital antibodies. Any donor animals should be from the same farm and vaccinated for clostridial disease.

It is not advisable to use cow colostrum as it risks introducing Johne's disease to the flock. In addition, a proportion of cows produce milk that is toxic to lambs. It is also not as dense in protein or energy. The next best substitute is artificial colostrum. Recent independent work by Murray Corke and students at the University of Cambridge assessed the concentration of antibodies and fat content of 14 commercial colostrum supplements, relative to ewe colostrum. Fat content compared favourably in most of the products. However, all fell short of ewe colostrum in terms of antibody concentration. They ranged from about 10 – 67 per cent of the concentration in natural ewe colostrum."

The campaign '#ColostrumIsGold' aims to get all livestock farmers maximising the benefits of colostrum. This may seem obvious - any shepherd knows that colostrum is the foundation of a good lambing season. However, there are means of managing your colostrum supply so that lambs that would otherwise go hungry get their fair share.