March 2026

NEWSLETTER

Black Sheep Farm Health
Dedicated farm vets

In-House Pre-Lambing Metabolics

The practice recently invested in a new piece of lab equipment that will allow us to now run pre-lambing metabolics ourselves rather than needing to send them away. This will mean that we can get results same day!

BTV Vaccinate Your Stock Bull Pre-Bulling

Due to the risk that bluetongue poses to fertility in breeding males and the risk of harbouring bluetongue infection, we're recommending booster vaccination of breeding males against BTV.

To discuss BTV vaccination further, please chat to one of the vets.

Use of Metacam in Neonates

A study of dairy animals found that 6% of new-born calves from unassisted births had fractured ribs and that these animals had significantly reduced daily live weight gains (DLWG). Dystocia, or difficulty calving, makes rib fractures more likely.

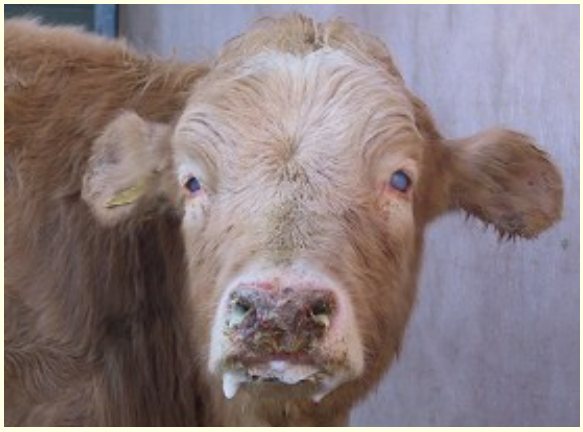
There is evidence that the use of anti-inflammatories such as Metacam, given immediately post birth, leads to greater calf growth in early weeks of life, likely due to reducing pain related to rib fractures or other calving-associated injuries, allowing for increased colostrum intake.

For this reason, we would recommend that any calves or lambs who require assistance at birth are given pain relief.

When giving pain relief to lambs or calves, make sure that you have an appropriately small syringe to give a correct dose and ensure that these lambs and calves receive colostrum as soon as possible.

MCF: An Incurable Disease of Cattle

Malignant Catarrhal Fever (MCF) is a disease of cattle caused by the sheep herpes virus.



The virus, which causes no clinical signs in sheep, causes severe depression with high fever and cloudy eyes in affected cattle. Affected cattle often have copious nasal discharge and crusting of the muzzle. Death usually occurs within 5-10d after the onset of signs, and so most cases are euthanised for welfare reasons.

Sheep shed more virus into the environment under periods of stress ie around lambing time. Cases of MCF in cattle are, therefore, most commonly seen when cattle have close contact with lambing sheep. Often months may pass between close contact with sheep and clinical signs being seen in cattle.

On mixed farms, it can be challenging to avoid all close contact or co-grazing between cattle and sheep, but we can take steps to reduce risk of MCF:

- Avoid housing cattle in the same air space as lambing ewes
- Muck out lambing sheds before housing cattle in the same space
- Do not co-graze cattle with lambing ewes, or behind them in the rotation
- Avoid cattle contacting sheep cleansings

The Importance of Brown Fat

Most lamb losses occur within the first 48hrs of life. Central to whether a lamb survives this critical period is its ability to maintain body heat, which depends on a special type of fat called brown adipose tissue (brown fat). Brown fat is formed before a lamb is born and is stored around a lamb's shoulders, kidneys and heart. Brown fat fuels a lamb for its first few hours of life, and therefore is critical to lamb survival, particularly for lambs born outdoors.

There are a number of factors that affect development of brown fat and, as a result, impact lamb survivability:

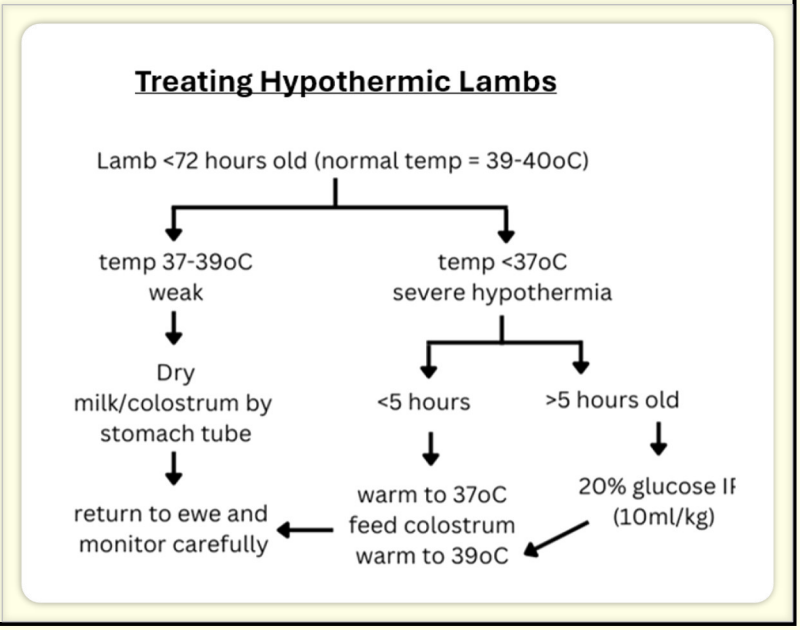
- Genetics play a crucial role in determining how much brown fat a lamb will develop. Some Breeds like Icelandic sheep, have more brown fat to tolerate cold conditions, tropical breeds produce much less brown fat.
- Ewe nutrition from day 80 to day 120 of pregnancy impacts how many brown fat cells develop. Nutritional deficiencies during this time can decrease brown fat reserves by 40%.
- Late pregnancy management impacts the maturation of brown fat cells into a functional resource for the newborn lambs; maternal protein deficiency, trace element deficiencies and maternal stress from day 120 to day 140 can have a detrimental impact on the brown fat reserves in the lambs.
- Ability of the lamb to utilise brown fat gradually decreases after birth. Lambs that receive colostrum are able to utilise this brown fat for longer.
- Twins require extra care to ensure they develop sufficient brown fat. Select rams with better breeding values for lamb survival, and prioritise the nutrition of twin-bearing ewes, to give twin lambs a better chance of survival.

Reviving Hypothermic Lambs

Each lambing season brings different challenges, but regardless of weather conditions, hypothermia is a major cause of lamb mortality. Cold lambs lose their suck reflex, which sends them into a vicious cycle of getting colder and less likely to survive. Management of individual cases depends on the lambs temperature, age and overall state, as demonstrated in the flow diagram below.

Intraperitoneal glucose is an important tool for reviving these lambs.
To administer an IP glucose injection:

- Prepare solution by mixing 25 ml of 40% Glucose with 25 ml of boiled water (10ml/kg of solution so 50ml for a 5kg lamb).
- Hold lamb by front legs and allow body to hang down. Using a 19G 1'' needle, aim to inject solution 1'' below and 1'' to the side of the navel, pointing towards the tail. Draw back slightly with syringe to check that no blood/urine/milk appear in syringe before injecting.



Black Sheep Farm Health, Unit 4a, Rothbury Industrial Estate, Coquet View, Rothbury, Northumberland, NE65 7RZ Phone: 01669 838 288 Email: info@bsfh.co.uk

Joe Henry 07502297044 Jenny Hull 07734432212 Jack Sheldrake 07793078949
Kaz Strycharczyk 07557092760 Claire Neillans 07717752034 Emili Canavan-Hicks 07778456969