

# MARCH 2024

# NEWSLETTER



## Spring Client Meeting

Thank you to all who attended our spring client meeting last month.

The raffle raised £106 for FCN.

FCN run a confidential, national helpline which is open every day of the year.

03000 111 999

## The Weight of Pregnancy

Do you know how much your ewes weigh?  
Probably.

Do you know how much your ewes weigh at lambing time? Maybe not.

The average additional pregnant mass, including uterine weight of lambs, placenta and fluids, is 9-11kg for singles, 14-19kg for twins and 20-22kg for triplets.

This means that a large, triplet bearing ewe could weigh in excess of 100-120kg!!

Something to consider when calculating doses for pregnant sheep!

## Small Calf Syndrome

The lab has reported a number of unusually small calves born across five different herds last spring.

These calves, which were either aborted, stillborn or alive, were born small and thin, with poor muscle mass, and often weighing less than 20kg. These calves were seen with oedematous placentas with a white surface, with membranes that were difficult to break. Infectious causes were ruled out.

Currently, the lab suspects that the issue may be related to placental development. If you see any similar cases this spring, please get in touch.

## Schmallenberg Alert

Schmallenberg (SBV) is a virus transmitted by midges associated with fetal deformities in ruminants and camelids.

Cases of SBV have been seen across the UK over the last two months in early lambing flocks. Cases have been recorded across southern and central England and Wales, and as far north as North Yorkshire.

The UK anticipates seeing the first affected calves from the start of March.

Schmallenberg virus is associated with deformities in lambs and calves, particularly skinny legs, fused joints and undershot jaws.

These deformities can cause difficulty at lambing and calving, and may necessitate a caesarean section or other intervention.

The last wave of Schmallenberg in the UK occurred between 2016-17, where over 200 cases were confirmed by APHA across sheep and cattle holdings, although the true number affected was thought to be higher.

**Free testing is available from APHA where Schmallenberg is suspected.**

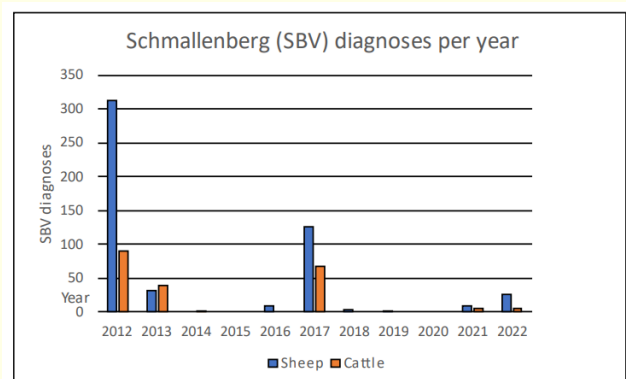


Figure 1: VIDA diagnoses of SBV between 2012 and 2022

It is thought that these peaks and troughs in incidence are related to waxing and waning of national herd and flock immunity; once an animal has been infected, it gains a robust immunity. As such, it is likely that cases will drop again for the years following this peak.

## High Scanning Percentages; Preparing for Excess Lambs

With higher than usual scans being reported, we need to be prepared to rear these excess lambs.

### Low survival rate in triplets

Average triplet survival to weaning is just 67%. Some of this can be attributed to low birth weights; lambs born under 3kg are more susceptible to starvation and hyperthermia. However, there are other factors that contribute to high mortality in triplet lambs, such as nutrition and mismothering, that we can try to address:

- **Nutrition & Colostrum is Gold:** Initial care of triplets is crucial; a lamb must receive 50ml/kg of colostrum as soon as possible after birth, and at least 200ml/kg by 24hrs. Ewe colostrum is preferred but not always possible. In this case, make sure to use an artificial colostrum product of sufficient quality. If insufficient antibodies are absorbed, lambs are at a significantly increased risk of death and disease during the pre-weaning period.
- **Mismothering:** When lambing triplets outside, mob size is an important consideration. An Australian study demonstrated that in triplets lambing outside, the size of the mob drastically impacted lamb survival; reducing mob size by 10 ewes increased lamb survival by 1.5%. In twins, the impact was less marked, the same change increased survival by just 0.2%. There is less mismothering and separation in small mobs, therefore less risk of starvation and death from exposure. This change in survival was independent of stocking rate and mob sizes in the study ranged from 10 to 110 ewes.

### To foster or to rear?

Fostering a lamb onto a single-bearing ewe or ewe who has lost her own lamb is preferred by many to having a pen full of pet lambs; milk powder is expensive, as is the time it takes to care for them. There are, however, some long term costs to fostering to consider:

- **Lamb weaning weight:** Using a ewe as a foster mother who has her own, single lamb at foot will reduce the milk available to her own lamb, decrease its growth rate and its weight at weaning. Leaving the ewe with just her own single lamb will mean it is finished soon after it is weaned, or even before the flock is weaned. This is also likely to increase its sale value which tends to decline as the marketing season progresses.
- **Age of lamb at slaughter:** The lower weaning weight of the lambs will significantly increase their age at slaughter and the amount of feed they require post weaning. This could easily add an extra 4-6 weeks of grazing to their requirements.
- **Condition of ewe at weaning:** The ewe will produce more milk if she rears two lambs, and so she will be leaner at weaning. This may be exacerbated if weaning is delayed because of the small size of the lambs. As a result, the ewe will require more feed post weaning to achieve her target condition for mating.

### Northumberland National Park & Advance Northumberland: Farming Advisory Service

The Northumberland National Park Authority are working with Advance Northumberland to deliver a Farming Advisory Service – farmers can seek support through workshops, appraisals and capital grants. This service is free of charge and is available to all farmers in rural Northumberland.

<https://www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk/about-us/looking-after-the-park/farming/farming-advisory-service/>

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