

# Black Sheep Farm Health

May 2023 Newsletter



## The Field Report

### **\*\*Nematodirus Risk\*\***

Nematodiosis can cause severe diarrhoea, a high number of mortalities and stunted growth in lambs. *Nematodirus battus* is very dependant on climatic conditions— a mass hatch occurs on the grass when a period of cold is followed by 10 days of temperatures above 10°C.

When this mass hatch coincides with lambs beginning to eat significant amounts of grass (around 6 weeks of age), the results can be devastating.

The damage to the lambs is done by immature larvae, no eggs are being produced at this stage. As such, worm egg counts are not a reliable indicator of risk and action must be taken based on estimating risk. The following considerations may be used to estimate nematodirus risk:

- SCOPS Nematodirus Forecast Map (<https://www.scops.org.uk/forecasts/nematodirus-forecast/>)
- Has there been a sudden, cold snap recently followed by a period of warm weather?
- Are your lambs old enough to be eating significant amounts of grass? (generally 6-12 weeks of age but may be younger if ewes are not milking well)
- As the infection passes from one lamb crop to the next years crop, are this years lambs on the same fields as last years?
- Have you got lambs that are under other stresses? e.g. triplets, on young or older ewes.

When risk level rises, lambs will need to be treated for nematodirus. Unlike other times of year, when we aim to leave at least 10% untreated when worming, **ALL AT RISK ANIMALS (THIS YEARS LAMBS) SHOULD BE TREATED FOR NEMATODIRUS.**

Nematodirus can be treated with a white wormer. Efficacy of the treatment should be checked with a worm egg count 7-10 days later.

Remember, it may be necessary to treat lambs more than once depending on the spread of ages in a group and subsequent weather conditions.

### **Efficient Suckler Cow Client Meeting:** **Wednesday 17th May**

Morning meeting covering sustainable beef production, EBVs and AI followed by a farm walk at Aln Angus.

**Wednesday 17th May, 10 am start**

**Bolton Village Hall, Bolton, NE66 2EE**

Kindly sponsored by CEVA and hosted by George Burrell.

Hot lunch and cake provided.

Please RSVP by calling the practice or emailing [info@bsfh.co.uk](mailto:info@bsfh.co.uk)



### **Early Cevac for Gimmers**

Enzootic Abortion (EAE), caused by *Chlamydophila abortus*, accounts for more than half of infectious abortions in sheep in the UK. It is estimated to cost the UK sheep industry £20 million each year.

As such, vaccines available to protect against EAE are considered essential in most flocks, particularly the flocks which buy in replacement ewes or ewe lambs, or have any direct sheep neighbours. Truly closed flocks with no chlamydia present may chose not to use the vaccine, but this leaves the flock vulnerable to any changes in circumstance.

Replacements should be vaccinated at least 4 weeks pre-tupping. Ewe lambs, where they are intended for breeding, may be vaccinated from 5 months of age while other first time lambers, Shearlings and older ewes, should be vaccinated during the 4 month period prior to mating. One single vaccine dose provides long term protection for susceptible breeding stock.

**We have been advised that there may be stock issues with Cevac later in the year. Vaccinating as early as possible will ensure your flock as protected even if there is a shortfall of vaccine pre-tupping.**

It is worth noting that sheep should not receive EAE vaccines during pregnancy, as may result in abortion, or while undergoing antimicrobial treatment, particularly with tetracyclines such as Alamycin, as may reduce efficacy of the vaccine.



## Heifer Selection

Heifers are the future of the herd but also a substantial cost to the enterprise, with heifer rearing costs accounting for 8.5% of the total cost to produce a calf. Selecting heifers which suit your system will allow them to lead a long productive life and ensures they cover their own development costs.

Calving heifers at 2 years old allows an increase in lifetime cow performance and reduces the cost of production, it also allows any barren heifers to be sold as prime beef after PDing. This won't suit every system and does require some careful management, particularly in nutrition to allow for adequate growth, and in careful selection of appropriate animals based on weight and genetics.

Heifer selection should take into account what kind of cows will suit your system and select for functional and fertile heifers, this normally takes into account factors both from the dam and the heifer herself:

- Dam assessment—no assisted calvings, calves early in the season and has a good temperament. This will require good record keeping. It may be worth considering keeping heifers from older cows these have survived your system for a long time proving they are suitable candidates
- Heifer assessment—the most important factor is weight, heifers should be 65% of their adult weight at breeding to ensure they are cycling and well grown enough to calf at 2 year old. This should be combined with pelvic measuring, discussed below.
- Any very large heifers should be culled as they will have large mature weights which is undesirable.
- Temperament is also an important factor for selection with poor temperament being an issue for health and safety and for production (flighty temperament animals have slower growth rates due to reduced feed intakes and poorer conception rates due to the impact of stress hormones on reproduction)
- Use of available genetic data is also important, look at the heifers sire EBVs particularly those for maternal traits. Calving ease daughters, age at first calving, scrotal circumference, mature size and milk are all important to assess

Prior to the breeding season, heifers should be up to date with any appropriate vaccinations, this should be in line with your herd health plan, of particular importance are BVD and Leptospirosis vaccinations.

There are also some management factors to help reduce the risk of dystocia in heifers. Pelvic measuring breeding heifers to ensure they have adequate pelvic area to reduce calving problems is a useful management tool particularly if you are breeding your own replacements. Also carefully selecting a bull to use over heifers to reduce calving difficulty is important, calving ease direct, low birth weight and short gestation are important EBVs to consider.

The use of synchronisation and Artificial Insemination (AI) should also be considered, this has many benefits but in particular for heifers it allows selection of an easy calving bull to be used in these animals, it increases the number of heifers calving early in the season which has many benefits. It can also allow the production of unrelated replacement heifers from bulls with more maternal traits. For any questions about AI, synchronisation, heifer and bull selection please talk to one of our vets, or come along to our client meeting on 17th May.

## Pre-Turnout Jobs

With the weather improving and the short, cold days of winter well behind us, it is a good time to consider important jobs to be done prior to turn out:

- Castrate and dehorn calves
- BVD check test calves (5 calves from each management group, aged 9-18 months)
- PD autumn calvers
- Bolus and vaccinate at risk animals according to your herd health plan
- Bull breeding soundness examination – Ideally completed 6 weeks prior to the breeding season to give opportunity for retesting if required. This is also an ideal time to consider foot trimming and to insert nose rings if required (health and safety are now advising bull rings).

**25% of bulls are found to be subfertile– can you afford not to test your bulls?**