

MAY 2024

# NEWSLETTER



**Black Sheep Farm Health**  
Dedicated farm vets

## How Well Does Your Fridge Work?

Vaccines are an important insurance policy on farm, preventing a wide range of diseases.

Appropriate storage of vaccines at fridge temperature (2-8° C) is important, but too often this job is left to the old kitchen fridge—the value of vaccines will massively surpass the value of your weekly shop!

Monitoring should be done continually to ensure the fridge stays within an appropriate temperature range. An MSD study showed that of 19 farm fridges monitored, none of the fridges maintained an appropriate temperature for the duration of recording, and many of these fridges were outside the storage range for long enough to affect vaccine efficacy.

There are many options for monitoring fridge temperature. A basic data logger can be bought online for a reasonable price.

We have been working with Beyond Wireless, a company providing fridge monitoring devices that send text alerts for power cuts and temperatures out with normal range.

Please give us a call for more information.

## Enzootic Abortion Testing Scheme

Enzootic abortion of ewes (EAE) is a top cause of abortion in sheep and costs the UK sheep industry up to £20 million a year.

Ceva has launched an annual 'Assure ewe' testing scheme for enzootic abortion, for farms that do not already vaccinate against EAE. To qualify for the subsidised scheme, you must have had an abortion rate of over 2% in your flock or if two ewes have aborted over two to three consecutive days. These abortions tend to be late term.

Up to six ewes can be sampled, ideally from three weeks to three months after lambing.

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

Nematodiosis can cause diarrhoea, 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 a mass hatch coincides with lambs beginning to eat significant amounts of grass, the results can be devastating.**

The damage is caused by immature larvae, so 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 estimated risk. The following may be used to estimate nematodirus risk:

- SCOPS Nematodirus Forecast Map
- Has there been a cold snap recently followed by a period of warm weather?
- Are your lambs old enough to be eating significant amounts of grass? (>6 weeks)
- 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 under other stresses? e.g. triplets, on young or old 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 treatment should be checked with a WEC 7-10 days later.

## AHWP #2

If it has been 10months since you last applied for the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway, you are now eligible to apply again.

## 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 turnout:

- **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
- **Pelvic measuring & heifer selection**
- **Bull breeding soundness examination:** Ideally completed 6 weeks prior to the breeding season to give opportunity to retest if required. This is also an ideal time to consider foot trimming and placing nose rings if required (health and safety are now advising bull rings).  
**In 2023, we failed 18% of bulls– can you afford not to test your bulls?**

## 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.

We should 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. 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 calve at 2 year old. This should be combined with pelvic measuring, discussed below.
- **Temperament**- poor temperament is an issue for both health and safety on farm and for production (flighty animals have slower growth rates due to reduced feed intakes and have 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.
- **A tight bulling period** of 6 weeks can be used in heifers to successfully select for fertility in your herd, but make sure that you bull more heifers than you plan to retain.

Prior to the breeding season:

- Heifers should be up to date with vaccinations in line with your herd health plan; BVD and leptospirosis vaccinations are of particular importance.
- Pelvic measuring breeding heifers to ensure they have adequate pelvic area to reduce calving problems is a useful management tool when breeding your own replacements.

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