

Black Sheep Farm Health

November 2021 Newsletter



The Field Report

As the cattle start to creep back into sheds and tugging still well underway there's plenty going on at our end. Hopefully you have all managed to stay out of the worst weather - and if you haven't hopefully you have a set of Kaiwakas!

Read on for a seasonal round-up...

'Trodax' Alternative available

Although 'Trodax' now appears to be off the market for good, a nitroxinil flukicide is still available. Nitroxinil is typically given to cattle several weeks post-housing. For more information, speak to Jack on 07793 078 949 or jack.sheldrake@bsfh.co.uk.

Want to try out our flaps?

We've bought some 'Quiet Wean' nose flaps to trial for clients to try when weaning calves this autumn. The idea is that they nutritionally wean calves before physical separation, and therefore reduce stress which in turn should reduce the likelihood of pneumonia and a growth check at weaning.

We've bought a batch of tags and want to find out how practical and effective they are. All you would need to do is run the calves through 4-7 days preweaning to fit the tags.

If anyone is interested, just get in touch with Kaz on 07557092760 or kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.



Look ahead to lambing now

Aoife Lakey, final year student at Bristol

With tugging drawing to a close for some, it may be worthwhile taking some time to think about this year's lambing and what you might want to do differently next year. Preparation is the key to success in such a busy period and you can often not start this early enough.



Did you have any problems with abortions, twin lamb, scours or worms it would be good to focus on?

Abortion rates should be no higher than 2%, with the majority caused by chlamydia (enzootic abortion) and toxoplasma.

Nutrition is vital to get right early on in pregnancy, with BCS needing to be 3-3.5 for an easy lambing down the line. Trying to correct this too late could see extra costs for feed but may come too late to help. Identifying lameness and getting on top of it now will also be sensible, lame ewes struggling to keep weight on may be prime individuals for twin lamb if not helped out now.

Cleanliness is key in preventing issues like watery mouth, navel and joint ill. The weather never helps sometimes but ensuring stocking density can be kept as low as possible will prevent build up of bacteria in the environment. If this is tricky, use of a pen disinfectant especially towards the end of lambing may be prudent or reserving the cleanest pens for the weakest lambs or triplets.

Also consider where ewes and lambs being turned out, do you know what your 'clean' and 'dirty' pastures are in terms of worm burden? Pastures which had older lambs on this year will likely be high risk for next year's crop, especially in terms of nematodirus. The key being to keep the challenge level low, but still enough to create immunity and so spend less on wormers. Remember those pastures rested this year, grazed by cattle or adult sheep will be the 'cleanest'.



Cull Ewe Screens

Ailsa Buchanan, final year student at Edinburgh

Cull ewe screens are a simple way of targeting further investigations into 'iceberg' diseases which may be affecting your flock, by only testing a small proportion of animals. These are usually done between weaning and scanning, when you have drawn out ewes to be culled.

What can be tested for in a cull ewe screen?

- Maedi Visna (MV)
- Johne's disease
- Caseous lymphadenitis (CLA)

Maedi Visna (MV)

MV is a wasting disease of sheep which can show up clinically in a number of different ways in affected flocks. MV is spread from dam to her offspring when they suckle colostrum.

There is no treatment for MV, therefore control is by maintaining strict biosecurity measures and a cull and replace policy.

Johne's Disease

This is another disease which causes wasting, most commonly showing up as weight loss in older sheep. Compared with cattle, sheep don't tend to have the diarrhoea which cattle infected with Johne's often do have.

Johne's can spread via faeces & colostrum from affected dams and also via the placenta during pregnancy. It can be a very costly disease on affected farms and so including the test in part of a cull ewe screen can help to identify problems within your flock before it becomes very widespread. Johne's in sheep can be managed by vaccination.

Caseous Lymphadenitis (CLA)

CLA is a disease which can be spread via close contact of sheep or via shearing equipment, cuts at shearing & fight wounds on tups. Treatment is usually unsuccessful and the clinical signs usually come back. Biosecurity is key for preventing introduction of this into your flock & ideally replacement sheep should be bought from accredited-free flocks. Cull ewe screens may identify CLA as a problem within your flock, and a test and cull protocol can be used to reduce disease with an aim to eliminating it from the flock.

Key benefits of cull ewe screens:

- Older animals selected for cull are more likely to have signs or positive results for these diseases if they are in your flock.
- Identify diseases limiting production within the flock & use this information to get a management strategy to improve production.
- You don't need to test the whole flock to get an indication of what is going on.

Myth busting – antibiotics and tup fertility

There is a common myth that gets banded around regarding antibiotics causing infertility in tups. No research, data or evidence exists to support this. In fact, research in Canada shows that commonly used antibiotics such as oxytetracycline (e.g. Alamylin) and tilmicosin (e.g. Micotil) has no effect on fertility in bulls even when used at a double dose. An exception to this rule is florfenicol (in preparation such as Resflor and Zeleris.)

What is much more likely is that the disease being treated reduces fertility as a result of the associated fever. In fact, prompt treatment with antibiotics and anti-inflammatories of a sick tup is key to reducing a high temperature and therefore protecting sperm production. Any tup that has been ill in the run up to tugging should be semen tested to make sure his fertility hasn't been affected.

