

Black Sheep Farm Health

October 2019 Newsletter



The Field Report

Plenty of news this month, and sheep fertility work is well underway as autumn calving continues apace. Read on...

Need students for lambing 2020?

Don't forget we can circulate placements among universities to secure you a student in good time! Just email kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk with details.

Dates for your Diary

Farm Workshop: Weaning the Spring Born Beef Calf

7th October 1pm - 5pm. £20 ex.VAT.

Our next farmer meeting will be a daytime event based at the host farm for our new branch, North Bellshill Farm, Belford. Lunch will be provided!

Weaning is probably the most significant challenge the suckled calf faces in its lifetime. The event will cover the nutrition, housing and social management of the calf and cow at weaning, as well as consideration on pneumonia and parasite treatment. There will be practical opportunities to use weigh scales and practice intranasal vaccination.

Mastering Medicine Course

11th November 6pm - 8pm £40 ex.VAT @ BSFH Rothbury

Complies with Red Tractor recommendations. Certificate of attendance and dinner included.

Places for both courses are limited so register your interest on 01669 838 288 ASAP.

Black Sheep Team News

The Black Sheep team are delighted to announce that Jenny and her husband Chris are expecting a baby at the start of 2020. She will be at work until the end of the year; until then there is a strict ban on all jokes about calving jacks and foot ropes...

To fill Jenny's boots while she is away from January to March, we are welcoming Sedona McNally to the BSFH team. Sedona graduated from The Royal Veterinary College in the same cohort as our very own Jack. She then returned to her native Norfolk for two years, working as a mixed vet. Keen to pursue her interest in cattle and sheep health, Sedona moved to farm practice in Cumbria and spent a busy year working with farmers in the Lakeland fells. In her spare time Sedona can be found out and about in the countryside, on foot or by kayak. She is looking forward to exploring Northumberland!



Do you know your sheep wormer resistance status? If not, why not?

Controlling gut worms in sheep is a fundamental of healthy and profitable sheep-keeping. **Resistance to the main three groups of sheep wormers is surprisingly common:** 94% of farms have resistance to white wormers, 68% to yellow wormers and over 50% to clear wormers. Using ineffective worming products is a waste of time, effort and money. Drench checks are easy to perform:

- Step 1. Collect dung samples from a group of lambs about to be wormed. Bring these to the vet for worm egg counts.
- Step 2. Use your worming product. Ensure any other reasons for treatment failure (e.g. poorly calibrated gun, correct dose rate, inaccurate weighing, out-of-date or poorly stored drugs) is ruled out.
- Step 3. Collect dung samples post-treatment* from the same group for worm egg counting

*White wormers: 14 days, yellow wormers: 7 days, clear wormers: 14 days

A great reference for the use of wormers can be found by downloading the ADHB Better Returns Programme publication 'Worm Control in Sheep for better returns'. We are also always happy to speak about the use of wormers in sheep and resistance on the phone – just ring in for a chat.



Weighing calves—why bother?

As the season approaches for weaning calves, it is a great opportunity to weigh them at the same time. Whether you sell them as weaned calves, stores, deadweight or breeding stock, for suckler farmers they are the major output. Weight is one important component of calf quality as it is a key determinant of price at market (weaned calves), days taken to finish (finishing cattle) and the onset of puberty (replacements).

The BSFH scales are **free to use for any client** and can be booked by ringing in on 01669 838 288. There are only two conditions: that they are returned **on time** and **clean!** We will be running a competition for anyone weighing their calves this weekend - watch this space...

Weighing them as they come through the crush generates useful information which includes:

- **Individual calf weights** can be used to dose any treatments on a per kg basis more accurately (e.g. wormers and flukicides). This prevents ineffective underdosing or wasteful overdosing. You can also compare calves sired by different bulls, or calves born to a sync and AI programme versus natural service.
- **Range of weights** is useful as even batches are desirable from a management and marketing perspective. If there is a significant spread in weight, some calves are significantly outperforming others. We can use this data as a starting point to investigate why this is the case.
- **Average weaning weights** compare year on year, as a measure of the success/failure of a management change. If, for example, you decided to condense your bulling period you can quantify the difference this made to the quality of your calf crop.
- **Total calf weight weaned** is another interesting measure of annual output, although it should be tempered with an understanding of the inputs and cost of production.

If you weigh the cows as well, you can generate other useful metrics:

- **Cow:Calf weight ratio** – It is not often the biggest cows that rear the biggest calves. By determining which of your cows are producing the biggest calves *as a percentage of their own bodyweight* you can retain these and use them to produce efficient replacements.
- **Total Weaning Calf Weight / Weight of Cow&Heifers put to the bull** has been identified as a Key Performance Indicator by AHDB and encompasses many aspects of health, fertility and maternal ability.

Calves can also be weighed serially to check the adequacy of your ration. For replacement heifers to calve at two years of age, they should be growing at 0.7-0.8kg/day (depending on type and mature cow weight) to reach the target 65% of mature weight at bulling. Regularly walking them through the crush for weighing them gets them used to the handling system and can be combined with other procedures, e.g. BVD vaccination or pelvic measuring

As with all data, it should complement stockmanship rather than replace it. Calves must grow well but conformation, temperament, feet and type are all important considerations. For an example of how weight data has contributed to one farm's profitability go to: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GgkcD6SO_g or search 'Beef KPI Project: Manor Farm, Oxfordshire' online.



The BSFH weigh scales in use