

Black Sheep Farm Health

October 2021 Newsletter



The Field Report

The wheel starts its next revolution and we are looking forward to next spring in this edition. Read on for more on PD'ing spring calvers, student placements and tup power.

Get cows PD'd and save yourself some £££

Pregnancy diagnosis for cattle, as for sheep, is a key tool in running a reliably healthy and profitable cattle enterprise. Many cows are going through the crush around housing anyway for vaccinations, worming or bolusing. Pregnancy scanning can dovetail with this nicely as we can work at one end while you work away at the other. We generally find that most of our clients, never ones to miss an opportunity, also use the time to quiz us about anything and everything - a service we are glad to provide!

Clearly the results are a reflection of a year (or more) of preparation. If you're pleased with the results then we know the year's plan has worked; generally aiming for 95% + in calf so we can wean 94 calves per 100 cows. If they are a bit disappointing then we can investigate potential causes: infectious, nutritional or fertility-related. If the results are skewed towards a particular group (second calvers for example) then that may point to quite subtle and specific changes to nutrition or management. These changes can then be put into place swiftly - in time for the following year's calf crop.

It is also a brilliant opportunity to condition score cows and target lean cows for extra feeding at this early stage; if we leave this correction too late it can result in simply dragging big calves out of thin cows.

It is not just a case of marking your homework, although admittedly it can feel like results day. Knowing how many cows are in-calf allows you to work out how much shed space, bedding and feed you should need until turnout. It also allows you to sell empty cows now rather than after a winter of feeding and bedding them. Feed and forage typically forms 70% of suckler farm costs and a suckler cow generally costs £350-500/year to keep - finding empty cows can therefore pay dividends as they can then be sold. This year is no exception; it's estimated that straw alone will cost about £60 extra per head. In herds with both autumn and spring calving herds, empty cows can also drop into the autumn herd on the proviso that it's not an excuse to keep stragglers.



Trying to do our bit

As a practice we inevitably generate a degree of waste, especially single use consumables. We decided to take some steps as a team to reduce our impact:

- Drugs now being dispensed in paper bags, rather than plastic bags.
- Using recycled polystyrene boxes from other practices to carry vaccines in, or reusable cool bags.
- Procuring food produced and processed locally for farmer meetings.

We understand these are small steps, and if anyone has any further bright ideas to improve our environmental sustainability, just let us know.



Tup Selection and Care

It is estimated that around 17 % of tups used in the UK are not fit for use. Consequences include a reduced lambing percentage and prolonged lambing period. A handful of key decisions help safeguard against disaster. **Tup Selection:** how and where. As the sale season draws closer, tups up and down the country will be painstakingly coiffed and handsomely fed in preparation. Everyone has specific preferences depending on their farm and target market. However there are some common features every effective tup should share.

He should be condition score 3.5-4.0 i.e. fit not fat. His diet should be similar to what he will be fed at his new home, as changes may also upset his fertility. Sale tups can sometimes struggle to survive in real-life conditions, let alone serve an adequate number of ewes. Over-fat tups have reduced libido and reduced sperm quality. Although tup sales are an integral part of the sheep calendar and great social events, bear in mind they have their pitfalls. Consider how many other sheep your new tup may have nose-to-nose contact with on sale day - each encounter is possibility for disease such as scab, CLA and others to spread between farms.

Tup Testing: his MOT

Tups should be examined in good time - 4-8 weeks prior to use - as any corrections to his fertility will take this length of time to take effect. The examination can be broken up into physical (including legs, feet, brisket and fighting injuries), genital (penis and scrotum) and semen quality (sperm numbers, movement and shape). All tups should undergo a physical and genital examination. Semen testing is a great tool and is appropriate for 'highstakes' tups:

- Being used for single-sire groups
- Being used for advanced reproduction e.g synchronisation.
- That have been flagged on examination as questionable.



Bought-in tups: give them a proper welcome

Tups should be brought onto the farm at least 8 weeks before they are expected to work. As with any bought-in animals, the tups should be treated with a combination of an orange drench ('Zolvix') and a flukicide to avoid bringing in resistant worms and fluke, respectively. Tups should be vaccinated in line with flock policy - typically including clostridial disease and pasteurellosis. If they are to be mixed with unfamiliar tups, pen them tightly to start with. This reduces the impact of fighting injuries. If tups are expected to work in areas where ticks are present, they should also be sourced from tick areas. Failure to do so can mean tups contract louping ill or tick-borne fever for the first time, which results in a temporary loss of fertility during the tupping period. Alternatively tups may be bought as lambs, exposed to ticks to acquire immunity before they are needed, then used as shearlings.

Students for lambing and calving

As always, this is a good time of year to think about manpower next spring. If you planning on taking a student, just email Kaz (kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk) with a short blurb including details of:

- Contact details.
- Number of ewes and type of farm.
- Indoor vs outdoor.
- Any accommodation, board and/or remuneration offered.
- Any previous experience required.