

Black Sheep Farm Health

September 2019 Newsletter



The Field Report

As the season changes so do the challenges. Autumn calving has started in earnest, and the lush grass means some will be fit as ever which is great for colostrum but hard on calving ease.

As the annual sheep cycle approaches its conclusion, finish on a high. Tups should be MOT'd, and any working in single sire groups, serving at a high ewe:tup ratio, or with suspect anatomy should have a semen sample taken. Consider the use of a **Zolvix** 'break dose' for lambs remaining on the farm.

Dates for your Diary

Talking Beef 2019

11th September: 10am - 4pm

Cockle Park Farm, Newcastle University, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 3EA

AHDB are putting on a one day technical event covering profitability drivers, health, nutrition, grassland and soils. Email KE.events@ahdb.org.uk or phone 01904 771218 to book your place as spaces are free but limited.

Farm Workshop: Weaning the Spring Born Beef Calf

7th October 1pm - 5pm. Register your interest!

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.

More details to follow but **places are limited** so in the meantime **register your interest with Hazel or Carole on 01669 838 288 or 01669 838 284.**

Stay vigilant for Staggers

Omer Gadot (Final year, The Koret School of Veterinary Medicine, Israel)

How does staggers occur?

- Grass Staggers, also called Hypomagnesemia or Grass tetany, occurs when there are low levels of magnesium in the cow's blood.
- This condition is caused by either low intake of magnesium, a decrease in absorption from the digestive system, or increased demand in milking cows. These factors frequently combine in high risk periods.
- Cows cannot store magnesium and they are greatly dependant on daily intake, therefore, clinical signs appear quickly and without prompt and effective treatment the cow may die.

Why now?

- Staggers is more common in the spring and autumn as magnesium is low in rapidly growing grass. Wet green grass also passes through the gut more quickly, giving the cow's digestive system less time to absorb the magnesium that is there.
- One outbreak this year has been associated with NPK fertiliser. The extremely dry summer last year has meant the fertiliser sat on the ground until this year. The grass that eventually grew this year was very high in potassium, which prevents magnesium uptake by the cows. Combined with the usual seasonal risk factors this resulted in an outbreak.



Take advantage of this crucial time of year for sheep wormers

In the UK, the three main groups of wormer are white (Group 1), yellow (Group 2) and clear (Group 3) products. For decades these were the only wormers on the market and their regular use led to widespread resistance.

The recent advent of Group 4, or orange, wormers (*Zolvix*, active ingredient monepantel) has been a welcome addition and **strategic use means we will be able to preserve the efficacy of our older wormer groups**

In the long term this means cheaper, effective worm control. **Zolvix should not be used as routine drench in lambs or ewes** as we must avoid resistance to this product at all costs.

When to use:

1. **Quarantine treatments** for incoming stock: This kills off any resistant worms carried by bought-in sheep which will proliferate on your farm.
2. **'Break drench' for lambs at weaning:** Remove resistant worms that have survived prolonged exposure to other wormer groups (1-3) used earlier in the summer.

As we enter the autumn, both weaning and the purchase of replacement breeding stock are in full swing. We can provide small volumes for bought-in animals e.g. purchased tups.

If you have any questions about how the use of Zolvix may fit into your annual cycle, do not hesitate to ring the practice on 01669 838 288 or 01669 838 284.



Recognising staggers

The cow can look restless, over-alert, excitable or aggressive. Sometimes even the cow will fall and go into convulsion.

Animals also frequently die without any prior signs of disease, so it should be on the list when a cow dies without warning. Remember sudden death should always be investigated for anthrax—the APHA pay for the visit and the anthrax test. Samples can be taken at the same time to test for staggers if the cow is recently dead.

Prevention of Staggers

Some cows may suffer from low levels of Mg without clinical signs, therefore supplementation should be given to animals at risk (fast growing grass, using fertilisers). Sublethal staggers may result in poor milk yield, poor fertility and poor fertility.

If in any doubt, cows can be blood sampled during high-risk periods to confirm the need for supplementation.

- Supplements include salt licks, high magnesium cobs or intra-ruminal boluses. Pasture can be dusted with magnesium oxide
- Straw should also be given in order to slow the guts down and so enable higher intake of Mg from the digestive system
- Phosphorus should be added if Mg is fed for a long time



Feeding straw is a key preventative tactic for Staggers