

THE UPDATE

Sunday 9th June
Open Farm Sunday @ D'Oyleys Farm
Stadhampton, OX44 7UE
10am till 4pm

GOODBYE.....

Hi Everyone

By now most of you will have heard I'm New Zealand bound at the end of June. I have got a job in a predominantly dairy practice on the North Island which is something I've always wanted to try. I've had the best 3 years working with you all so a big thank you for making it so enjoyable and welcoming me onto your farms, especially in the early days! At the moment the intention is to work and travel for around a year before hopefully returning to NorCal armed with new knowledge and experience, so watch this space.... you can't get rid of me that easily!!

All are welcome to join us for a drink at the Six Bells in Thame from 8pm on Friday 21st June to say goodbye!

Charlotte :)

SMALLHOLDERS CORNER

External Parasites in Pigs

We've been seeing some backyard and pet pigs over the last few weeks and one thing to keep an eye out for is external parasites. Pigs can be affected by mites, lice, fungi (ringworm) and ticks.

One of the more severe infestations is caused by sarcoptic mites. These mites are very small and can only just be seen without a microscope, but they can cause a lot of damage. If left untreated the skin becomes very thick and scaly with multiple scabs and the pig will be very itchy.

Treatment of a small number of pigs generally involves injection of an anthelmintic (containing ivermectin or doramectin). Two injections are required 2 weeks apart. The mite can only live for about 5 days off the pig so this means that when treating an outbreak, it is best to move the pigs to a different temporary housing during treatment so when they return to their normal housing, the mites left in the bedding will have died. If this is not possible, you should at least get rid of all old bedding and clean the housing area and apply an insecticide.

Lice will cause similar signs to mange but are larger and may be seen with the naked eye. The treatment is also the same with two injections given 2 weeks apart.

Keep an eye out for early signs of skin irritation and itchiness to avoid these external parasites becoming a major problem.

Synchronisation and Artificial Insemination of Cows

If you want your cows to calve in the spring next year, you'll be wanting to get them in calf over the next couple of months. An option to consider, instead of using a bull, is to synchronise the cows and artificially inseminate (AI) them. At first glance this may seem like an expensive option, however, there are several things to consider which in certain cases can make synchronisation and AI a more cost-effective option.

According to NADIS it can cost up to £1500 a year to keep a bull, further calculations reported in Farming Life (based in Northern Ireland) estimate that a bull can cost around £88 per calf produced in a suckler herd. Therefore, if you only have a small number of cows, keeping a bull can be very expensive, particularly as for the vast majority of the year it has no purpose on the farm. Ideally the bull is kept separate from the cows outside of the mating season, however, for many people this isn't possible so with the bull kept in with the cows all year, the calving pattern can be very haphazard which doesn't allow you to focus your time and energy on calving at a specific time of the year. Another thing to consider is the possibility of your bull going lame or getting sick, making it difficult or impossible for him to work. If you only have enough cows to warrant a single bull, this situation could be disastrous for your calving pattern and often results in a second bull being found in a hurry without the option to carefully select the bull which is most suited to your herd and business plan.

A different option that some people with smaller numbers of cows go for is to get a loan bull for mating. This eliminates the cost of keeping the bull throughout the rest of the year and also avoids the problem of where to keep him for the rest of the year. However, you will still need to feed him for the time he is there which can be a considerable cost depending on how long you have him.

Another disadvantage of bringing a bull onto the farm each season is the risk of disease introduction. Every time you bring an animal onto the farm you risk introducing diseases such as BVD, IBR, leptospirosis, digital dermatitis and Neospora.

The cost of a semen straw can vary depending on the bull it comes from but can range from a few pounds to around £40. If you combine this with a fixed time AI synchronisation programme performed by your vet you will only require one straw per cow. The synchronisation programme requires a single vet visit where we will insert an intravaginal device (PRID or CIDR) and administer a hormone injection. We will then leave you with further hormone injections to give the cows on specific days and you will remove the intravaginal device on a set day. Finally, you will need to organise an AI technician (usually from Genus) to perform AI on your cows. This system of fixed time AI synchronisation generally produces a 50-70% conception rate, providing no abnormalities are detected in the reproductive tract when the vet examines it.

In this way, it can be cheaper (not to mention safer!) to use fixed time AI instead of having a bull on farm if you don't have a lot of cows.

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