

## NorCal News...

We will be at the FFF&B Ploughing Match

On: 28<sup>th</sup> September

At: Barrington Park Estate, Burford, Oxon OX18 4TN

Come and have a drink and a bite to eat!

### Acorn Poisoning

Acorns are one of the most common causes of plant poisoning in the UK, especially in the late summer and autumn, with more problems often seen after strong winds and gales.

#### Signs of acorn poisoning:

- Off colour and poor appetite
- Straining to pass faeces and urinate
- Constipation at first, then black watery diarrhoea
- Weakness, collapse and death

Sudden death can occur, but poisoning usually occurs over a period of a few days.

Generally, acorn poisoning only affects one or a few cattle in a group, as cattle need to eat large amounts of acorns to be poisoned. The poisonous compound in acorns concentrates in the milk of suckler cows so fast growing calves on milky dams may be the first in the group to show signs.

Acorn poisoning is usually diagnosed based on suspicion of these signs, and we sometimes can also find evidence of acorn consumption in the animal's stomach on post mortem exam. Blood or urine samples on live animals may be useful to rule out other diseases and increase suspicion of acorn poisoning.

There is no specific treatment for acorn poisoning, but most cattle will recover if promptly removed from fields with acorns as soon as they show signs of poisoning. Supportive therapy, such as oral or intravenous fluids, can help to reduce the severity of the disease. In more severe cases, euthanasia may be necessary.

**The best way to protect stock from acorn poisoning is to be aware of the risks and try and avoid exposure of cattle to acorns. This can be by fencing off the area around oak trees or not grazing fields with large numbers of acorns present.**

### Pasteurella in Lambs

Pasteurella is most common cause of coughing and breathing difficulties in lambs. It is caused by the bacteria *Mannheimia haemolytica* and other signs include fever and discharge from the eyes and nose, and sometimes sudden death if the bacteria gets into the blood stream.

Pasteurella is often seen when conditions or management result in periods of stress – for example, extremes of weather, transporting or handling lambs, and diet & housing changes. In housed lambs, it can be a particular problem in humid conditions, especially if ventilation is poor or if stocking density is too high.

**Diagnosis** of Pasteurella is usually based on the clinical signs or on post mortem examination.

Whilst we can treat Pasteurella with antibiotics, there is also a lot we can do to reduce the risk of it occurring in the first place.

**Improving ventilation in housing, reducing stress and changing diets gradually rather than abruptly can all help.** In addition, ensuring lambs have a well-functioning immune system is important – this includes managing worm burdens and ensuring mineral supplementation is appropriate.

Finally, we can vaccinate for Pasteurella with products such as Ovipast and Ovivac/Heptavac P Plus. It is really important for the vaccines to work that lambs get two doses 4-6 weeks apart. However, the effect of these vaccines against Pasteurella does start to fade after about 3 months. It may therefore be worth giving a third dose to lambs that have been vaccinated early in the year prior to the high risk Autumn period October-December.

## Scour in Autumn Calving Herds

As the start of Autumn calving approaches, it's time to get prepared for the new arrivals.

Scours can often be a problem for Autumn born calves, and it's worth considering the use of the Rotavec-Corona vaccine to protect calves from two of the common viruses that cause scours during the first few weeks of life.

This vaccine needs to be given to cows between 3-12 weeks before they are due to calve, and importantly it relies on the calf receiving plenty of colostrum from vaccinated cows in order to have a protective effect.

Whether or not you choose to vaccinate, current recommendations are that every calf receives 4-6 litres of good quality colostrum in the first 6 hours of life.

It's therefore worth getting some containers ready for storing any surplus colostrum, getting tubers and feeders disinfected and ready, and ensuring calf housing has been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected to minimise the risk of disease spread between groups.

**If you would like more information on Rotavec-Corona vaccination or advice on preparing for your Autumn calves please get in touch with the practice.**

## Getting Ready for Topping

A successful lambing season starts with getting your tups ready for action!

**Picking your Rams:** Traditionally, one ram is required to cover forty ewes. Ram breeding ability peaks between the ages of 2 and 5.

**10 weeks before:** Ensure your rams are up to date with their Heptavac P vaccines, which prevent against Pasteurella and Clostridial diseases.

**8 weeks before:** It is advisable to check your rams for any abnormalities or suboptimal characteristics at least 8 weeks before topping, as sperm production takes approximately 7 weeks. A full MOT of your rams includes checking their body condition score, checking for lameness and a genital exam.

### Body Condition Score

Rams should have a BCS of 3.5-4 at topping but this may be breed dependent. They are likely to lose condition during the topping season, but will have a reduced libido and fertility if overweight. Ideally, they should be used to a grass diet, and supplemented with any elements that your grass is deficient in; selenium, cobalt and zinc are important for ram fertility. Ensure good nutrition for rams for at least 8 weeks pre-topping, as sperm production starts then. Check your rams teeth to ensure they will continue to eat well throughout topping.

### Lameness Check

Topping is a very active time for rams, and their libido and ability to cover ewes can be impeded by lameness. You may consider vaccinating against foot rot as a preventative measure, but consult with your vet before doing this.

### Genital Examination

Examination of the scrotum and testes can be done by palpation, checking for abscesses, hernias, skin abnormalities or injuries. A scrotum circumference of over 36cm may be abnormal. The testicles should be flexible and evenly sized and should not be painful to touch. Any discharge or injury of the prepuce should be noted; bloody discharge could result in the spread of infectious disease to ewes during service.

**Any abnormalities can be further investigated by your vet.**

**Semen quality can also be examined by your vet in the run up to topping to assess sperm density, motility and viability.**

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