

Fertility Testing

With calving underway for most Spring calvers, it's time to start thinking about the upcoming service period. For those of you using natural service, it's worth planning ahead to get your bulls fertility tested in plenty of time before service is due to start. That way, any problems can be dealt with to ensure you have a fully capable team of bulls from the start of service.

Fertility testing includes a full physical exam of the bull, assessment of the scrotum and testes and an internal examination. We then take a sample of semen and use a microscope to check the activity levels and swimming ability of the sperm whilst still on-farm. The sample is then taken back to the lab at the practice for further assessment of the shape and appearance of individual sperm.

For some herds, there can be a number of advantages of using AI instead of (or in addition to) bulls. For beef herds in particular, AI becomes a lot more economically and practically viable if used following a **synchronisation protocol**, allowing fixed time AI of all animals at once. If this is something you are interested in then get in touch with us, and we can develop a protocol that works for you.

If you are doing your own AI and storing semen on farm then we can also offer **semen testing** to ensure that the straws contain adequate amounts of viable sperm. We defrost a straw of each batch using the same technique as you would prior to AI, then look at the contents under the microscope to check motility and movement.

Coccidiosis in Lambs

The wet Winter and Spring means that it is a particularly bad year for coccidiosis in lambs. Flocks particularly at risk are early lambers running intensive systems, as you can quickly get high levels of disease building up in housing or on pasture.

Lambs that are most at risk are those aged 3-12 weeks - generally older lambs will develop some immunity over time, although if they are suddenly exposed to a large burden of disease they can be affected too.



Signs of coccidiosis in lambs include scours (which can sometimes contain blood), weakness and reluctance to stand, and dehydration. Affected lambs can die quite quickly if not treated.

Testing for coccidiosis is done from a faecal sample, so if you have any concerns about lambs it is definitely worth dropping a sample into the practice. There are a variety of treatment options available, including in-feed medication or oral drenches. It is also important to make sure that severely affected lambs are rehydrated with electrolytes.

Prevention of coccidiosis relies on excellent hygiene and biosecurity - ensure that sheds are fully cleaned and disinfected before sheep are housed, clean out individual pens between uses, keep any feeding equipment clean etc. For outdoor lambs, regular pasture moves and moving troughs to prevent poaching are key. In addition, as with all infectious diseases, ensuring lambs get adequate good quality colostrum within 6 hours of birth is fundamental. In some circumstances a preventative treatment may be recommended to protect lambs at high risk times.

Spring Calving Checklist

With spring calving around the corner (or already started for some!), here are a few things that might come in useful during your calving period:

- **COLOSTRUM!** Make sure you have some back-up colostrum. Newborn calves should have 5-6% of their bodyweight in good quality colostrum as soon as possible after birth. This is around 2L for a 40kg calf. The colostrum can be fresh from the cow, frozen or a powder to mix up. Good quality colostrum ASAP after birth is the most important thing in keeping calves healthy as they get older. It is also useful to have a stomach tube to get colostrum and fluids into calves that don't want to suck.
- **Navel treatment** – calves should have their navel dipped with >7% iodine to prevent navel and joint infections after birth.
- **Calving jack/calving ropes** – calving ropes and a calving jack can be useful for difficult calvings. Make sure they are clean and close to the calving cows so they can be grabbed quickly. We have a calving jack that we can bring out to calls so don't panic if you don't have one!
- **Full length gloves and plenty of lube** – Wearing gloves is a good way to reduce bacteria being transferred into the vagina and uterus and therefore prevent infection after calving. Lube will also prevent tears and make it easier for your arm to go in and the calf to come out!
- **Calcium** – have a few bottles of Calciject No 5 in stock in case of milk fever. If you suspect milk fever in your cattle, inject a bottle under the skin and call a vet.
- **Disinfectant** – a lot of post calving infections are due to unhygienic environments. Make sure you disinfect all equipment after using it and keep calves in clean freshly strawed pens. All pens that have had cows in should be cleaned and disinfected before another cow and calf are allowed in there.
- **Antibiotics** – check with us about which one is best to use depending on the problem
- **Pain relief** – don't underestimate how painful calving is for a cow, sometimes all she needs is some pain relief administered to make her feel better. Call us if you want advice.

Disbudding Calves

Getting calves disbudded is a job that can sometimes slip through the net during busy calving periods. However, dehorning them later on is much more time consuming, expensive and stressful for the animals involved. If you are struggling for time or assistance to get dehorning done, we may have a solution!

Groups of calves can be sedated by a vet, facilitating quick, easy and stress free disbudding. Each pen is bunched behind a gate, every calf injected with sedative, and over the next 5-10 minutes they will all drop off to sleep. This allows us to disbud the calves with minimal restraint. Sedative doesn't provide any pain relief so it is still essential to use local anaesthetic and pain relief. After the procedure is completed, the calves will start to come round and are soon back on their feet.

This method of disbudding has some significant advantages - less stress for the calves (and the people), reduced labour requirements, no need for a calf crush or handling system, and the ability to get large numbers of calves disbudded in a short time!

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NorCal Vets Thame

Pearces Yard, Aylesbury Road,
Thame, OX9 3AS
Tel: 01844 260 616
Mob: 07725 039 093 (Evan)
thame@norcalvets.co.uk

NorCal Vets Wantage

Unit 8a Elms Farm Business Park, Grove Road,
Wantage, OX12 7PD
Tel: 01235 429 767
Mob: 07711 923 909 (Jono)
wantage@norcalvets.co.uk