

NorCal News... Invoices / Statements

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Parasite control in grazing cattle

There are 3 main groups of parasites to be aware of in grazing cattle:

- Gut worms - eggs overwinter on pasture and hatch when temperatures increase in the Spring. Normally, the burden will gradually increase as the season goes on, but warm and wet spells can cause mass hatching events that trigger sudden disease outbreaks, so be particularly vigilant following these periods. Signs to look for are scouring, weight loss or poor growth rates, dullness and poor coat quality. Faecal egg counts can be used for diagnosis and also to check that treatments have been successful.
- Lungworm - this also survives overwinter on pasture, and cattle that have not previously been exposed to it are susceptible. If you notice coughing in a group of grazing cattle, lungworm is one possible cause. If it is a recurrent problem, it may be worth considering vaccinating stock before turnout in the Spring.
- Fluke - fluke can cause a range of signs from milk weight loss to sudden death. Late summer and Autumn are high risk times for severe/sudden fluke cases (acute fluke), but chronic (less severe/longer duration) illness can be seen throughout the winter and Spring too. Fluke rely on a certain species of wetland snail to reproduce, so restricting access to wet/boggy areas is important for control.

Managing worms and fluke in cattle at grass requires constant awareness. Key factors determining the risks for each group include:

- Age of cattle - for gut worms, younger animals are typically at higher risk than older ones, as immunity gradually builds up. However, older cattle that have had limited exposure to gut worms can still be susceptible. For liver fluke, no immunity builds up so cattle of any age can be affected.
- Farm history of parasite burden - you will probably be aware from previous years which parasites are present on the farm. If unsure, it may be worth doing some strategic testing. Other useful information can be gained from abattoir feedback. In herds that buy in cattle there is always a risk of introducing new diseases - ensure you have a good quarantine procedure in place. For parasites, this usually involves treating cattle as they move onto the farm and then housing them for 24-48h after treatment to limit shedding onto pasture.
- Grazing history - keeping records of which fields have been grazed by which age group can help you to plan a rotation that minimises spread between year groups. Where possible use mowing, crop rotation or other livestock to clean up pasture for younger cattle.

Actions to take now:

- Consider worming calves to limit the build up of eggs on pasture - if in doubt, have a chat with us and bring in a faecal sample to test.
- Try to graze hay/silage aftermaths with calves as these are the animals that will benefit the most from the clean grazing
- Listen out for coughing that could indicate lungworm



Weaning lambs

When to wean

- The exact time of weaning will be different for each flock. Factors to consider when deciding when to wean include
 - Ewe body condition score (BCS) - you should aim to wean ewes at a BCS of 2.5. If the BCS is lower than this, weaning early (~10 weeks post lambing) can give the ewes more time to recover. See <https://www.wynnstayagriculture.co.uk/blog/how-to-body-condition-score-ewes.html> for a useful guide on how to condition score ewes.
 - Feed availability - if the availability of good quality forage or grazing is restricted, it's a good idea to wean early to prioritise the lambs. If you have plenty of good grazing you can wean later as ewes and lambs are not competing for feed.
 - Lamb growth rates - if these drop under 200g per day on average it is a good idea to wean and get the lambs onto your best quality grazing. However, have a chat with us as underlying disease issues can also affect growth rates.
- What to look out for immediately after weaning
 - Mastitis in ewes - keep ewes on extremely restricted grazing for the first 7-10 days post weaning, or until udder size reduces. Examine udders carefully when checking stock - swelling or hardening of one or both sides could indicate mastitis.
 - Stress related disease in lambs - weaning is a stressful event, and as a result lambs may have reduced immunity during this time. Most frequently, this can be seen as an increase in worm burden. Moving lambs to clean pastures (e.g. hay/silage aftermaths) at weaning can help to mitigate this. As always, drop in a fecal sample to us to get a clearer picture of the lambs' status.
- Other considerations
 - Growth check - a small growth check is natural at weaning. It may therefore be worth keeping any lambs that are fit/almost fit on the ewes until they go for slaughter.
 - Minerals - once weaned, lambs are no longer getting minerals through the ewes' milk so they will need supplementing separately. This is most often a problem with cobalt/B12 - deficiency of which causes poor growth and coat quality. Lambs can be supplemented in a number of ways, including drenches, boluses or injections.



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