

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

January 2024

Beef Suckler Group Meeting

Thursday 22nd February 2024 from 6:30pm
@ Chinnor Rugby Club in Thame.

We have set the date for the next Beef Benchmarking meeting. This will be a chance to discuss and go through all your data – anonymously! As well as any updates and information going into spring calving!

Please can you get your beef benchmarking questionnaires back to Becca please via email or drop into the office by the end of January! Any questions please call Becca on 07860920479.

Spring Calving Rota-Corona Vaccine

As you are preparing for Spring calving it may be beneficial to have a think about whether you had many cases of scours in calves last year. Scour is one of the most common causes of death in young calves and pregnant cattle can be vaccinated against rotavirus, coronavirus, and E. Coli (K99) from 12 until 3 weeks prior to calving. This is especially a good idea for those of you which have a history of scour problems. Calves who have gut damage from scours will not achieve the same daily growth rates and will take longer to reach your weight targets.

Antibodies produced by the cow from the vaccine will be stored in her colostrum and passed to the calf at their first feed - it is important to note that antibodies produced by the cow or heifer will not transfer to the calf before birth. Therefore, it is again vital to follow the 1,2,3 rule and ensure that in the 1st 2 hours a calf receives at least 3 litres of good quality colostrum as the ability of the calves' gut to absorb antibodies begins to decrease from 2 hours after birth. Vaccination does not protect against cryptosporidium however calves who have a co-infection with crypto and rota or coronavirus are severely more affected. If scours are an issue, it is always worth the cost to collect samples for us to test to identify the cause, best treatment and how to prevent further infections.

Please give us a call to discuss vaccinating against scour or how to effectively deal with an outbreak of scours should one occur.

Suckler Ewe Mastitis Bacteriology Project

The APHA Small Ruminant Expert Group is undertaking a suckler ewe mastitis bacteriology project during the 2023/2024 lambing season. We have been asked submit milk samples from flocks experiencing cases of mastitis. Farms can submit up to three samples from each lambing cohort of ewes / ewe lambs throughout the lambing season. Samples can be submitted between November 2023 and May 2024. These samples will need to be collected aseptically so please give one of the vets a call on how to do this correctly. All testing will be fully subsidised.

The aim of the project is to improve surveillance of bacteria causing mastitis in suckler ewes and provide antimicrobial resistance data. In addition, samples will also be used to provide surveillance for Contagious Agalactiae and identify Mycoplasma organisms that may play a role in suckler ewe mastitis.

Pneumonia in calves

We have seen a big surge in the number of pneumonia cases in various age groups over the past couple of weeks. If you have multiple cases, please get in touch with one of the vets to discuss taking swabs. These must be taken from animals not yet treated with antibiotics and should be taken as early as possible in the course of the infection. We can arrange free lab testing as part of a subsidised scheme to identify the primary pathogens involved and guide vaccination choice/most suitable antibiotic.

Ewe Nutrition Pre-lambing

Lambing pen hygiene, Ewe Nutrition and Colostrum quality are the key factors in preventing watery mouth and reducing lamb mortality.

Lambing Pen Hygiene

- It is estimated that one in five lambs die because of unhygienic conditions. Lambing pens should be thoroughly cleaned before ewes come into lamb using a DEFRA approved disinfectant. Once the pen has dried, bed it up with plenty of clean, dry bedding. Continue to clean out and disinfect lambing pens each time they are used. This becomes more important as the season progresses due to the build-up of infection. Hygiene is just as important during lambing - disposable arm length gloves should be worn or scrub hands and arms with a suitable disinfectant.
- It is vital to keep feeding equipment sterile - teats, tubes, mixing buckets and other utensils should be disinfected between uses and left to dry correctly.
- Navel dipping is also key. The freshly broken umbilical cord is covered in blood which is the perfect medium for the spread of bacteria. Best practice is to use a 50:50 solution of 10% iodine and surgical spirits.

Pre-Lambing Ewe Nutrition

- Nutrition of the ewe pre-lambing can have vital implications for health and production around lambing time. Underfed ewes are more likely to suffer from conditions such as pregnancy toxemia and mastitis, have a lower lamb birth weight and survival rates as well as reduced colostrum and milk yields – leading to poor lamb growth and health.
- However overfed ewes can also encounter problems around the lambing period including prolapses and difficult lambing's due to oversized lambs. Lambing difficulties can also delay the onset of lactation and large lambs may lack vigour. Overfeeding ewes also increases feed costs unnecessarily.
- The lambs develop dramatically in the last six/seven weeks of pregnancy. This coincides with the ewes Dry Matter intake reducing significantly when there is a dramatic increase in her energy requirements. Nutrient dense feed is therefore critical in late pregnancy. Forage should ideally be analysed to determine energy, protein, and intake potential. Forage may cover energy requirements up to 7 weeks pre lambing however in the weeks just before lambing it will not. The gap between energy provided from forage and her new increased energy needs must be filled with additional sources such as concentrates, lick buckets etc. Hay has a slightly lower quality than silage so supplementation will need to be earlier.
- Feed availability in lambing pens is another key consideration. Try to ensure all ewes can eat at the same time, limiting space such as by placing the feeder in the corner where one side can't be accessed means shyer ewes get worse quality feed. Also consider the number of ewes in the shed - bales will start to deteriorate after 3 days of being open reducing their intake as palatability decreases along with increased risks of Listeriosis. This is the same for feeding concentrates - fighting and shoving as well as certain stronger ewes eating extra creep causes dips in rumen pH and subsequent risk of acidosis.
- We recommend bloods to assess the ewe's metabolic status pre-lambing. This involves checking around 6-8 ewes 4-6 weeks pre-lambing and seeing if any alterations in feeding is necessary. This could be timed with clostridial vaccination if necessary.

Colostrum

Lambs should receive 50ml of colostrum per kg body weight in the first hour. After lambing check each lamb has a good supply. If not or the lamb is unable to suck, you should feed the lamb using a stomach tube preferably with colostrum taken from freshly lambed ewes. Having a store of this in the freezer would be a good approach. Remember to warm the colostrum up gently using hot water, never microwave as this will destroy the antibodies. Best scenario to worst for lambs needing colostrum:

1. Colostrum harvested from ewes carrying singles or lost lambs.
2. Pooled colostrum from your own cows on farm. There is a risk of anaemia from some cow's colostrum when feeding to lambs therefore pooling colostrum from a few cows reduces this risk. You will also need to feed 30% more colostrum as cows' colostrum is lower in proteins/fat.
3. Best three artificial - varying studies show Immunicol platinum for lambs and Vet plus lamb aid are tied and then ovicol gold lamb colostrum would be next best after them. Try to avoid the others.

When needing to - Coccidiosis

Coccidiosis tends to become a problem from about three weeks post lambing. If possible, late born lambs should not be grazed on pastures that earlier born lambs previously grazed. This is particularly important if there is a long lambing period.

