

July 2024

Message from Megan

Hi,

Hope you are all well and your pets/livestock too.

Thank you so much to everyone that has thought of or asked after me during my time off, it always meant so much and I'm pleased to report my recovery is going well :) The support from clients while I was at work and whilst I've been away really made a big difference to some tough days/weeks.

I've missed chatting with many of you, and work itself but unfortunately due to changing circumstances I won't be returning to my role at NorCal - so here's a big Thank You and a sort of Goodbye... I hope I may bump into at least some of you one day!

All the best,

Megan

Pre Topping Checks for Rams and Ewes

Rams

Pre-topping checks can rule out common problems and can give you an indication of whether you should have a tup semen tested. Up to 30% of rams are generally found to be subfertile - not ideal while planning a compact lambing season. Checking over eyes, mouths, feet and body condition scoring is important as well as palpating scrotums and examining the prepuce.

Checks should be done at least 8-10 weeks before they are needed as sperm production takes 6 weeks allowing time for problems to be addressed. A fit, fertile ram will get more ewes in lamb in a tighter time period (finishing lambing earlier!) and will also last longer in your flock.

If you have any doubts about a tup it is best to give us a call and arrange a fertility exam where we examine a semen sample under the microscope.

Ewes

Now is the time to address problems with your ewes if not thought about already - If aiming to begin lambing on 1st February, topping will begin on 7th September and 6 weeks prior to topping is the 27th July!

Weaning is the starting point to consider next seasons lambs. Ewes need sufficient time to recover condition so this needs to be taken into account when deciding when to wean.

Ewes which achieve a high level of body condition at topping will have higher ovulation rates and therefore higher lambing percentages by reducing the number of ovarian follicles that go into regression and fail to ovulate. This process of ovarian follicle growth starts around 6 months before the breeding season. Low body condition delays the onset of oestrus (heat) and increases the proportion of barren ewes.

To ensure that ewes are in the correct BCS at topping we advise condition scoring 10-12 weeks earlier. An increase of $\frac{1}{2}$ a unit in BCS is equivalent to approx 7% liveweight or 5kg in a 75kg ewe. Record ewe condition at weaning, separate ewes into thin, average and fat groups and manage accordingly - with the poorest getting additional grass or feed (0.4kg/day cereal) as necessary - this should be the first priority. In general concentrate supplement on grass is not needed if grass quality is high and sward height is maintained at 6cm. On poor quality grass or where swards are below 4cm it's advisable to feed 0.4kg cereal/day. Luckily research has shown that the adverse effects on ovulation rate of poor nutrition 6 months prior to the breeding season can be offset by flushing in the two weeks prior to topping. So if your ewes have had a particularly stressful summer location and lost a lot of condition try flushing them prior to mating. We will cover ways of flushing your ewes next month.

Lice in Goats

We have seen an explosion in cases of goats infested with lice in the past couple of weeks. Lice (unlike mites) in goats are visible to the naked eye and cause goats severe annoyance and irritation. Left untreated scratching can cause nasty crusting and wounds from scratching. There can also be concurrent mite infection.

Topical powders while potentially helpful in preventing lice are not sufficient to treat lice and a spot on must be used. Unfortunately there are no products licensed for lice in goats therefore please give us a call and a vet will advise on and prescribe a suitable product. Please note as goats are food producing animals dog spot ons are not suitable or legal as well as not being effective!

Cobalt Deficiency (Pine) in Lambs

This time of year we predictably start to see cobalt deficiencies in lambs. Ruminants require cobalt in their diet as rumen microbes use it to synthesize Vitamin B12 - essential for energy metabolism and deficiency can result in suboptimal growth rates.

Deficiency can be exacerbated by heavy worm burdens and antagonism from soils high in iron and manganese reducing absorption. Milk from ewes provides an early source of B12 (as long as the ewes diet contains adequate levels of cobalt!) . However as forage intake and worm burdens increase from 6-8 weeks of age we start to see issues.

Depending on your system and target growth rates if you have a high percentage of lambs not hitting targets or showing signs of deficiency (tear staining, poor quality fleece, scabby ears, ill thrift, poor appetite, skinny) then we would recommend blood sampling 6-10 lambs.

Options for supplementation include:

- Drenches : cheap but only last max 3-4 weeks (can be only a week!) depending on the drench. A lot will pass through the gut unabsorbed if damaged from worms
- Boluses: long acting up to 6 months but cannot be given to small lambs. Need a functioning gut for absorption.
- Short acting Injection: (Dodocile): Immediate action, bypasses gut, lasts for up to 4 weeks. (Approx 31p/ml - dose =1ml/10kg.)
- Long acting Injection: (Smartshot): Expensive as imported from New Zealand. Six months cover. Contact us if interested.

Red Mites in Poultry

Red mites are blood sucking ectoparasites that infest and feed on chicken and turkeys. We can see them at any time of the year but they are particularly a problem in the warm summer months when higher temperatures give the mites the ideal conditions to breed.

Red mites are visible to the naked eye but can be more difficult to detect in lower infestations. Being nocturnal they hide in cracks and crevices of your poultry's house during the day and then emerge at night to crawl up the bird's legs and up to feathers to feed. After feeding they return to their hiding places to digest the blood meal and breed.

We would advise all our poultry keepers to regularly check their housing especially over the next couple of months paying particular attention to any cracks and crevices, perch ends and nest boxes. A tip is to quietly look in the coop after dark with a torch and use a white sheet of paper and smear any mites you see onto it - red streaks will appear.

Low numbers of mites cause birds irritation however heavy infestation can suck enough blood to cause anaemia. This will cause pale combs and wattles, weakness, loss of condition, reduced egg production and even death. Mites can crawl onto human skin and cause irritation but do not live on humans.

It is important to confirm that red mites are the problem you are dealing with and then treat both the birds and their housing/environment. We recommend two products when dealing with a red mite infestation - Exzolt and CBM-8. Exzolt is put in the drinking water twice seven days apart to treat the birds. Housing should be thoroughly cleared out of bedding, jet washed and then a solution of CBM- 8 can be used in a knapsack or spray bottle depending on coop size to treat the environment. Please give one of the vet's/office a call if you suspect a red mite issue this summer and we can dispense medication.

Sheep Fair Reminder of Date

We look forward to seeing a lot of you at the Thame Sheep Fair on 1st/2nd August. After great success last year we will be offering a free FEC for each client on site on the day - a perfect opportunity to test any sheep you buy and see if they need to be treated (clear FECs do not mitigate the need for quarantining for other disease!!). Please chat to us regarding worming and quarantine of incoming sheep but a quick summary ahead of next month:

1. Yard all animals for 48 hours
2. Administer zolvix
3. Isolate from flock for 28 days
4. Turn out onto fields grazed by main flock if available for 3-4 weeks during isolation time
5. FEC 14 days post treatment
6. After 28 days animals can join home flock

Wormer resistance is something we have become acutely aware of over the past year after using the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway to check your flocks post worming. Following the above protocol while costly initially can avoid buying in resistant worms and causing huge knock on effects in the next couple of years. Remember it is worms not sheep themselves that are resistant to dosing products.

Flies!

It's the time of year again for flies to cause problems to cows whilst at grass. As well as being irritating, flies can be responsible for issues such as New Forest Eye and Summer Mastitis.

New Forest Eye is the most frequent case we see accountable to flies. Officially called IBK (Infectious Bovine Keratoconjunctivitis), it is a highly contagious bacterial eye infection spread by flies in the summer months.

Signs to look out for:

- Tear staining under the eye
- Conjunctivitis (red eyes)
- Cattle blinking a lot
- Corneal ulcer
- Pain when exposed to sunlight

Severe cases can lead to permanent damage and sometimes even rupture of the eye resulting in surgery needed to remove the affected eye.

- Early treatment and fly prevention is key
- Eye tubes such as Orbenin or Opticlox can be used before ulcers develop when tear staining only is present
- Many cattle will need injectable antibiotics/antiinflammatories: Alamylin LA 300/Engemycin 1ml/10kg IM and Emdocam 1ml/40kg SC
- Severe non responsive cases will need a subconjunctival injection by a vet in an attempt to save the eye.

There are many fly control products on the market such as spot ons, fly tags, garlic licks etc. Please ensure you read the fine print as we generally see issues when products especially spot ons are assumed to last 8 weeks and may only last 6!

Eye infections/ulcers are extremely painful (imagine having salt in your eye as an example!) - although common it is important to bear in mind they will have knock on effects on feeding/growth rates and everything that comes with this.

If you have a case please contact us as one case means other cattle are susceptible either from direct contact or flies will carry infection from animal to animal. Therefore fly control is generally the easiest way to reduce risk as isolation can not always be an option.

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