NorCal Veterinary Services

Newsletter

WISHING YOU A HAPPY NEW YEAR! January 2025

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.

Beef Suckler Group Meeting

A reminder for those of you who are part of our beef suckler group to please return your questionnaires by the **15th of January!**. This year we have decided to use an online system to make it slightly easier but you can still print and fill it in if you wish to do so and send it back/drop it in to the office. We will send another email with the link so please check your emails.

The meeting will be held on **Wednesday 29th January from 6:30pm** onwards at the Thame Chinnor Rugby Club. Please let us know if you can make this as well.

Listeriosis

We have also noticed an increase in the numbers of listeria cases recently.

Listeria is a bacterial infection infecting sheep (mainly), cattle and goats. The bacteria is everywhere in the environment being found in soil, sewage, bedding, water and food - and replicates on poorly kept silage. Disease is therefore more commonly seen in winter months when more silage is being fed.

Clinical signs can vary with most of us on the lookout for classical circling. Other typical symptoms include inappetence, drooling, one sidedness particularly in the face with drooping eyelids, lip, ear, head pressed into corners and disorientation and abortions.

Treatment needs to be swift and aggressive, we recommend high doses of Engemycin/Alamycin, steroids (if not pregnant), emdocam and B vitamins intravenously. Supportive treatment of fluids and electrolytes will help those animals struggling to drink and feed.

Control involves good silage management avoiding feeding any spoiled forage particularly to pregnant animals, keeping feed and water troughs clean avoiding soil and faecal contamination. There are also additives that can be added to silage to alter the pH and reduce Listeria replication.

NorCal Vets

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PTO

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 toxaemia 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.