

Acorn Poisoning

We along with other vets around the country have diagnosed an increased number of cases of acorn poisoning in the past month or so. This is due to a dry summer and recent windier weather triggering heavier acorn fall from oak trees.

Acorns contain toxins which damage the digestive tract, kidneys and liver leading to death. Symptoms typically appear 3-7 days after ingestion:

- Dullness, depression, loss of appetite
- Abdominal pain and bloat
- Constipation followed by black tarry diarrhoea
- Straining to urinate or defecate
- May present as sudden death or progressive organ failure usually within a week

Unfortunately, there is no antidote to the toxins and diagnosis is made on clinical signs, history of exposure to acorns and post mortem findings. Supportive care such as fluids may help if caught early but prognosis is poor once kidney damage sets in.

Preventative measures can include:

- Fencing off oak trees during high risk periods
- Supplementing feed to reduce temptation
- Spreading muck over where acorns have fallen to cover them
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OPA - Ovine Pulmonary Adenocarcinoma

OPA also known as Jaagsiekte is a contagious cancer of the lungs of sheep - one of the so called "ice-berg" diseases of sheep. Similar to the disease Maedi Visna (MV) this is a slow moving and often under-recognised disease but is a significant cause of economic and welfare losses in flocks.

OPA is spread by respiratory secretions and has a long incubation period (months to years). This allows the cancer causing virus to be shed and infect other sheep while they themselves appear healthy.

Signs are usually seen in sheep over 2 years old. Flocks with close housing, poor ventilation and/or high stocking density are most at risk for transmission between animals as well as those flocks with limited culling or replacement turnover,

Clinical signs include:

- Gradual weight loss despite good appetite
- Increased respiratory effort especially after exercise
- Moist cough or nasal discharge
- Positive Wheelbarrow test - this test is performed by lifting the hindquarters of a sheep and watching the nose - clear fluid running out of the nostrils is positive for OPA and the sheep should be immediately euthanased.

Unfortunately, no blood test is available to screen for OPA and diagnosis relies on clinical signs, wheelbarrow test, ultrasound of the lungs and post mortem exam where tumours are visible in the lungs.

Culling affected animals is essential to reduce spread and as always careful sourcing of replacements, quarantining and monitoring new arrivals for signs of disease is vital to reduce risk.

Late Pregnancy Nutrition and Calf Birth Weights

With calving coming around it's tempting to think that trimming back feed for heavily pregnant cows and heifers might lead to smaller calves and easier calvings. However this is not strictly the case and actually causes more issues.

While some studies have shown a relationship between energy intake in late pregnancy and calf birthweight the differences in practice were minimal and provided no difference in calving ease.

On the other hand, underfeeding cows in late pregnancy has been shown to lead to potentially harmful effects on both the cow and calf.

- Prolonged under-feeding of first calving heifers will reduce their bodyweight at calving, and therefore actually increase the risk of calving difficulty.
- Cows lose body condition making recovery slower and reducing fertility post calving
- Under-feeding cows in late pregnancy may result in reduced calf immunity, poor suck reflexes and reduced supply of nutrients to the calf via the placenta.
- Colostrum quality drops
- Higher risk of ketosis and retained cleansings - especially in dairy cattle
- Rather than cutting feed, focus on balanced nutrition and body condition monitoring with an aim of 2.5-3 at calving and ensure minerals are supplied to support immunity and muscle tone for calving.

Keeping Ewes Stable After Topping

With many of you having put your tups in or planning to soon, it's time to think about the critical first month of pregnancy and what to avoid.

What's happening inside the ewe?

- Fertilisation - happens within hours of topping with embryos reaching the uterus within 4-6 days.
- Implantation - happens around days 14-16 when embryos attach to the uterine wall
- By day 30 - placental development begins.

Any major stress, nutritional changes or handling during this period can disrupt implantation and cause early embryonic loss.

What to avoid?

- Sudden diet changes - switching from grass to silage or concentrates too quickly can upset rumen function and reduce nutrient absorption
- Transport or regrouping - mixing groups, moving farms or aggressive handling can spike cortisol (stress hormone) and interfere implantation
- Fluke or worm doses - some drenches are not safe in early pregnancy so always check the data sheet or check with one of us.
- Shearing/dagging or foot trimming - delay until after the first month unless absolutely necessary

What to prioritise?

- Consistent nutrition - maintain energy and protein levels, don't let body condition slip
- Quiet management - keep groups stable, avoid unnecessary movement and handle calmly
- Mineral access - ensure ewes have access to trace elements especially selenium and iodine which support embryo survival
- Monitor ram performance and ewes returning to heat

Grazing root crops

Root crops such as turnips and kale can provide an excellent source of feed for animals through the winter months. However, there are a few health issues that can arise, so here are a few top tips for preventing problems:

- Review your mineral supplementation - root crops can cause iodine deficiency, which affects fertility and causes stillbirths. They can also predispose to milk fever and other deficiencies at calving time, so take particular care with pregnant animals.
- Ensure that there is also a good source of fibre available - hay, straw or silage bales should make up at least 30% of the diet
- Wait until the root crop is mature before turning stock onto it - immature root crops can cause photosensitisation, especially in younger animals and those with white skin or patches
- Try and introduce the diet change gradually, and ensure animals don't gorge themselves on roots when they are first introduced - this can result in digestive upsets and bloat
- Due to the increased bare ground in these crops, animals are at an increased risk of contracting Clostridial diseases such as Black leg and Pulpy kidney. Ensure that all animals going onto root crops have had a full course of clostridial vaccination, e.g. Bravoxin for cattle or Heptavac P for sheep.
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Housing Cattle and Worms

Housing is a perfect time to worm to "clear out" animals of worms they have picked up whilst at grass. While it may seem like a good idea to use a combination product at housing to kill fluke and worms, fluke products have no persistence and you need to wait a number of weeks after housing before treating for fluke to ensure that it removes all of the life stages. As an example, Closamectin pour on is a product we see being used frequently. The flukacide in this product will only kill fluke from 7 weeks of age. Therefore, any fluke picked up just before housing will not be killed on that day. From a money saving point of view - the flukacide part is many times more expensive than the wormer therefore a cheaper wormer only product at housing time is a much better option. It is best to wait until seven weeks after housing and then treat again seven weeks later. While triclabendazole products will treat most stages of fluke it is one of the only products left - this product should be strictly left to treat cases of adult fluke especially in sheep because of the widespread resistance we are seeing. There is also widespread resistance of fluke to triclabendazole which you may not be aware of in your herd.

In cattle we recommend a clear wormer at housing time due to its ability to kill dormant stages of Ostertagia - a stomach worm which buries itself in the gut wall and is often reactivated in late housing and can cause serious clinical signs and death. These pour on wormers (Group 3 Ivermectins) are also effective against mange. Please consider not routinely worming adult cattle over 2-3 years old as adult cattle generally build an excellent immunity to gutworms through exposure. However routine worming can stop this immunity developing - making the importance of FECs on youngstock very important!

Worm egg counts are the best tool we have to determine the need for worming during the summer. We recommend youngstock less than 2 years old (especially first season grazers) are tested three times during the grazing period starting two weeks post turnout.

Important! Vitamin D For Alpacas

Alpacas in their natural South American environment will be exposed to much higher levels of UV light compared to the UK. Since removing them from their natural sunny environment they now have a lack of UV exposure during winter months. It is therefore important to supplement Vitamin D to prevent poor calcified bones similar to those seen in human Rickets disease.

- Younger, growing animals will require up to three doses (November, January, March)
- All animals should be given one dose in November.
- Pregnant females should receive two doses in November and January.

Vitamin D can be given by injection - please give Kathriona or Becca a call to discuss.

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