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Flushing ewes before putting the rams in has the most effect in ewes which are below target BCS. Sudden changes in diet should be avoided before, during and for up to 1 month after the rams come out as this can lead to problems with implantation of the embryos in the uterus. A consistent level of feeding and ewes in the correct BCS is more important than flushing ewes pre-tupping and then not being able to maintain this.

Trace elements were discussed, with deficiencies in cobalt and selenium in ewes specifically being shown to have negative impacts on ewe fertility. Over supply can also cause problems so knowing the status of your animals through blood tests is important before treating them. A number of farmers agreed they had seen improvements in scanning percentage in their flock after using boluses to correct mineral deficiencies.

Infectious agents such as toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion were discussed as potential causes of barren ewes and abortion, with prevention focused around the use of vaccines (Toxovax and Enzovax). Again a number of farmers discussed seeing improvements since starting to use these vaccines in their flocks.

We also talked briefly about rams, as obviously even if the ewes are in perfect condition if the rams are not up to the job the ewes will not be able to fulfil their potential! The ram ratio people use was discussed, with figures varying from 1:25 to 1:80! Preparation of the rams

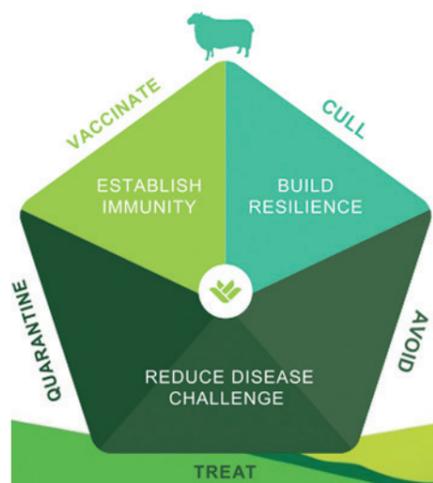
for tupping is something we will discuss at a future meeting in more detail.

The 2nd topic of discussion on the night was antibiotic use, with all the farms being bench marked against each other to compare usage. Use on the farms at the meeting varied from 2.6 mg/PCU to 33.5mg/PCU, all well below the governments target of 50mg/PCU. These are typical of sheep farms in the UK, and show that for the sheep industry the main aim should not necessarily be to reduce overall usage but to ensure that all usage is done responsibly. The Sheep Veterinary Society have made a statement that said "It is totally appropriate to use antibiotics to treat clinically ill sheep, It is not appropriate to use antibiotics in healthy sheep as a routine or on a 'just-in-case...' basis. The challenge is to prevent animals becoming ill in the first place".

The main areas of use of antibiotics in the sheep industry are at lambing time, often in new born lambs to prevent problems such as watery mouth and joint ill, in the control of enzootic abortion and also lameness. Discussions on the night focused mainly on ways to control problems such as watery mouth and joint ill without the use of antibiotics, through good husbandry and nutritional practices to ensure ewes produce excellent quality colostrum (#colstrumisgold!) and by ensuring that hygiene levels are maintained through lambing. Many farmers talked about how they had moved away from reliance on antibiotics (such as Spectam or injecting lambs) and now had low levels of disease. Antibiotic use in new born lambs can sometimes be justified, but blanket use should not be necessary. We talked about how to assess the risk and when it could be appropriate to use them in high risk situations.

Lameness was briefly discussed as the data showed this is one of the biggest areas of antibiotic use on our flocks. At our last meeting we talked about lameness control, focused around the 5 point control plan, and that all areas need to be looked at, just focusing on one area is unlikely to lead to much improvement.

Dan Leyman BVSc MRCVS



March 2018

## Welcome to the March edition of our newsletter

Here we continue our detailed focus on the responsible use of antimicrobials and provide seasonal updates.

As always if you have any concerns or need more information please contact one of the farm animal team.

## Flock Health

Last month's Flock Health Discussion Group was very well attended, with the topics of discussion for the evening being Ewe Fertility and The Responsible Use of Antimicrobials.

February may seem like a strange time of year to be discussing Ewe Fertility but the ideas being discussed focused mainly on planning well ahead to make sure ewes are in the right place at tupping time to fulfil their potential.

Body Condition Scoring of ewes is something the discussion group have talked about quite a few times in the past, especially during last years discussion around pre-lambing nutrition. Research from the Sheep KPI project being run by AHDB Beef and Lamb has shown BCS of ewes to be one of the most important KPI's for performance of a flock.

They have shown that is not just the BCS of the ewes at tupping time (target for lowland ewes is BCS 3.5) that is important, but also any changes those ewes have experienced in the 6 months up to tupping – i.e. from around the previous lambing. Follicles on ovaries have a 4-6 month long term cycle, so any periods of poor nutrition during this time can affect future performance. Ewes which are in poor (BCS 2 or below) condition at weaning will have a reduced scanning % compared to ewes which have only lost less than 1 BCS between lambing and weaning.

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## NADIS Parasite forecasts and newsletter

We are now able to offer a more in depth and accurate parasite forecast. NADIS (National Animal Disease Information Service) has launched a new service with parasite forecasts available based on weather data for a localised 40 sq. Km area – allowing for a more accurate prediction of risk for diseases such as liver fluke, lung worm and worms (especially nematodirus in the spring). Previously forecasts were based on a regional level (e.g. South west), and there is actually huge variation within these regions. This year is a good example, with the small squares covering our area having a high fluke risk, and the majority of the rest of the South West having a medium-low risk.

For a small monthly subscription of £2.50 you will receive a detailed monthly parasite forecast and disease alerts at critical times of the year. This will enable you to make informed decisions on when to treat you animals, ultimately saving time and money by only treating when necessary and also reducing disease levels which have costly impacts on production.

If you would like to sign up to the service call or email Shelley on 01884 32228 or valefarmvets@btconnect.com



Working to maximise your livestock's potential

## Digital dermatitis

Sara Pedersen wrote a useful review of digital dermatitis recently and many of the points she discussed are worth repeating.

- DD is estimated to be present on >95 % of farms in the UK, causing reduced cow performance, (yield and fertility) and increased susceptibility to other lameness conditions.
- Whilst the active stage of DD is well recognised, carrier and chronic infection stages exist and are the main source of infection on a farm. The aim of control is to treat all the active stages and ensure they become disease free or at least dormant.
- Not all DD affected cows are lame: so mobility scoring alone will not detect all cases. The best way to identify affected cows is to inspect individual feet. This is best done in the parlour by cleaning the feet and using a mirror to inspect the heel bulbs and interdigital space.
- As infected cows are the main source of infection, blitz treatment of all cows with active lesions will quickly reduce the level of infection in the herd, (the bacteria that cause DD survive less than 24 hours in slurry at 17°C).
- Topical treatment is the most common form of treatment. Using injectable antibiotics to cure DD is likely to be difficult as the same bacteria in humans need long courses of high dose antibiotics.
- Antibiotic footbathing is no longer an acceptable method of herd treatment. This is because of increasing concerns about antibiotic resistance and the disposal of footbath solutions after use, as well as the problems of a standard milk withhold of 7 days.
- Topical antibiotic treatment is effective. Using sprays works well as long as the lesions are cleaned and dried before treatment.
- Avoid non licensed antibiotics. Research has detected these antibiotics on teats and in milk following use.
- Despite their common use, there is no evidence that bandaging makes any difference. Certainly, leaving bandages on for a prolonged time can create a perfect environment for DD bacteria to grow.
- Avoid using caustic products such as copper sulphate, as they cause pain and may encourage bacteria to migrate deeper into the skin.
- The most successful treatment is to lift the cows foot, wash and dry the lesion, thoroughly spray, leave for 30 seconds and then spray again. Treatment may need to be repeated for up to 5 days for severe lesions.
- Footbathing with formalin or copper sulphate should be regarded as a prevention rather than a treatment. By keeping the feet clean and disinfected, DD bacteria are discouraged from colonising the skin. Think of footbathing like teat dipping and mastitis, it will not cure DD but it can help to prevent it if done regularly.
- Remember the heifers and the dry cows when footbathing.

DD predisposes to deeper more serious claw horn lesions in cattle, so effective control is essential. Adopting some of these control measures will help reduce the impact in your herd.

*Martyn Whitehead BVSc DBR MRCVS*



Having a good foot bath design is important for effective footbathing. A design that is easy to use is important to ensure that it is done regularly. Talk to us if you want help redesigning yours to make it easier to use and more effective.

There are currently 40% grants available for automatic footbaths through the Countryside Productivity Small Grant scheme - applying is a very simple process, but the deadline is 14th March!

## Transition Cow: Too Much ... Too Little

The subject of transition cow management keeps on coming up, and a recent webinar from AHDB highlighted some of the American points of view. Gordie Jones is a vet and dairyman from Wisconsin.

He advocates the 'Goldilocks' approach to dry cow feeding, maintaining that dry cows can stay on one diet for the whole of the dry period, providing that things are 'just right'!

### Not Too Much:

- Body condition
- Weight loss in the dry pen
- Time in the dry pen
- Energy in the diet
- Too many lactations
- Twins/ Triplets
- Grain
- Overcrowding
- Excess soluble protein

### Not Too Little:

- Body condition
- Weight gain in the dry pen
- Time in the dry pen
- Energy in the diet
- Selenium
- Cow comfort
- Dry matter intake
- Fibre
- Protein
- Magnesium

### Gordie's blue print for the dry cow diet includes:

- > 50% forage
- No more than 4 kg dry matter of high NDF but low effective fibre by product feeds
- No more than 4 kg dry matter of corn silage (maize or wholecrop)
- 3-4 kg of chopped straw
- Essential to avoid sorting
- Crude protein 13.5 -15.5%
- Aim for 12-14 kg DMI in far off cows and 11-13 kg in close up cows

## Focus: The responsible use of antimicrobials

### Biosecurity and hygiene

#### So far we have looked at:

- Selective DCT
- Critical antibiotics
- As little as possible, as much as necessary ethos
- Lameness
- Use of finadyne transdermal

#### The next few top tips will be focusing on reduce the risk of disease on farm

1. Biosecurity and hygiene
2. Farm health planning and vaccination programmes
3. Ventilation and Stocking densities
4. Nutrition and access to fresh water

### Keep disease out

1. Source of cattle: Only buy/import cattle from herds with similar or better health status. Screening and monitoring will help to limit the spread of disease. Quarantine new cattle, vaccinate and integrate appropriately.
2. Vehicles and visitors: Limit transport through the farm and have sufficient disinfection facilities.
3. Pests: Control rats, mice, flies, birds, avoid contact with other stock and keep cats and dogs away from cattle.

### Keep disease levels down and stop spread

4. Cleaning: Apply new bedding regularly when cattle are housed. Keep passages, walkways, collecting yards and loading ramps and trailers clean and disinfected.
5. Vaccination: Speak to one of us and make sure that animals are vaccinated if necessary and receive boosters as agreed.
6. Mixing cattle: Avoid mixing cattle. Avoid putting poor cattle back with younger ones.
7. Water: Keep it clean!!
8. Staff hygiene: CLEAN and disinfect boots and wash hands between houses/groups – especially with calves!
9. Outdoor cattle: Rotate pasture regularly with secure fencing (using double fencing if appropriate).

*Anna-mae Morton BVMS MRCVS*

Keep the dry cows in one or two groups: either is fine. The advantage of two groups is that close up cows get better attention, but he advocates feeding both groups the same ration. The reason is that if close up cows are fed higher energy diets, then they reduce their dry matter intake. This reduction is carried through into the start of lactation affecting their energy balance as well as mineral metabolism including calcium. Sub clinical milk fever is associated with increased incidence of dirty cows, retained cleansings and LDAs. Gordie's idea is that the rumen fibre mat should remain a constant size during the dry period and into lactation, by ensuring the dry matter intake is maintained but with a reduced energy density in the dry period. The overall energy density he recommends is only 8.88 MJ/ kg DM which is



possibly slightly low compared to some UK systems. But if this is fed for the whole dry period, this level of energy is low enough to avoid overfat dry cows, particularly if they are in the dry pen for longer than 42 days.

Fibre length is crucial, with straw chopped to no more than 2" long (or a mouth width!)

Potassium in the mix needs to be kept as low as possible, as high potassium has an adverse effect on calcium metabolism, leading to more milk fever. (Interestingly, we have seen more milk fever this year, and high potassium in the silage is definitely one possible cause)

There also needs to be adequate magnesium in the diet to further protect cows against milk fever.

His experience is that the number one problem with dry cow rations is sorting, and that this can only be avoided by ensuring the straw is properly chopped.

Gordie's recommendations are not too different to some of the systems used in the South West, but his examples indicate the importance of attention to detail and monitoring body condition.

The full recording of Gordie's presentation is available on the AHDB Youtube channel. It only lasts 35 minutes, and is worth a visit. (Gordie Jones, AHDB Achieving Excellence in Fresh Cows).

*Martyn Whitehead BVSc DBR MRCVS*