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JUNE 2020 NEWSLETTER

UNASHAMEDLY POLITICAL “EDITORIAL”

The Agriculture Bill passed its third and final reading in the House of Commons on Wednesday 13th May, the most significant change to agricultural legislation since 1945. A late amendment was proposed by Neil Parish MP to prevent future trade deals from allowing food into the UK not produced to the standards required of farmers and processors within the UK.

This amendment was **defeated** by 51 votes. Our own MPs – Mel Stride and Geoffrey Cox – together with the Minister of State for Agriculture (George Eustace) voted against this amendment. Over the past couple of weeks since this vote, I have been surprised at how few farmers realised this Bill was even taking place, let alone the result and the voting record of our MPs. That said, there has been no mention of it in any main stream news channels as they are all too concerned with Coronavirus. The Bill now passes to the House of Lords for deliberation, where hopefully they will reject it and send it back to the Commons for amendments to be made.

The British Cattle Veterinary Association, Sheep Veterinary Society and Goat Veterinary Society have written a joint open letter to the House of Lords, stating that it is imperative that the UK maintains our high standards of production and guarantees that imports produced to a lower welfare standard never reach our shelves. The issues with the Bill as it currently stands are threefold:

- The import of meat produced using products which are illegal in this country represents a food safety issue.
- Meat produced from systems with lower minimum standards creates a significant animal health and welfare concern.
- Importing meat produced to lower standards, requiring less capital investment, prevents a level playing field and as such creates a food security issue. Essentially you will be priced out by imports, becoming completely unsustainable. This will be especially true for the beef and lamb sectors.

The veterinary and farming industries have voluntarily made a 50% reduction in antibiotic use over the last 5 years, through a combination of better engagement and improving management systems. The prophylactic use for enhancing growth rates and as a tool in disease management is no longer routinely practised in the UK. We should be rightfully proud of this achievement but be mindful it is not a global standard.

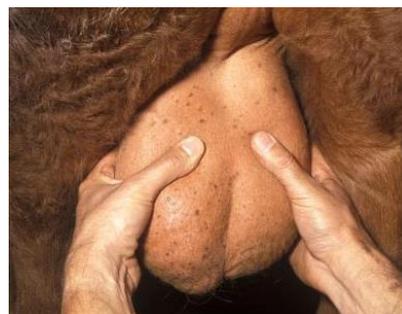
With an ever-increasing global population, sustainability is an essential facet of any food production system. The NFU has made a commitment to ensure British agriculture has net zero global warming effect by 2050. Agriculture can be a key contributor to sustainability through reduction of emissions, carbon capture via well managed grassland, and by improving soil health and biodiversity. It can help the nation achieve its ambitions while still maintaining a safe, secure food supply, and protecting animal health and welfare. Without farming, the landscape will change indefinitely, directly impacting upon other industries such as tourism and leisure.

At the time of writing this I have not had a reply from Mel Stride MP asking why he voted against the amendment, a decision which is overwhelmingly harmful to all of us – his constituents. I hope the House of Lords will reject the Bill and return it to the Commons. If you feel strongly about this issue, perhaps you will join me in writing to your MP so that they are aware of the implications this Bill will have on you. This may lead them to vote in a different way, if they are afforded the opportunity for amendments. **Jonathan Hobbs, Director**

TIME FOR YOUR BULL & HEIFER 'MOT'

Soon your bulls will be back to work again. Now is the time for their "MOT" or bull breeding soundness examination to ensure they are in good order and fertile ahead of the breeding season – can you really afford to run the risk of them firing blanks?

According to AHDB figures, an **average bull costs £1660/year** to keep yet should only **work for nine to twelve weeks a year**. To justify this cost it is therefore crucial that they are working well when required; if a bull only sires 30 calves this equates to £55 per calf born, but this reduces to £33 per calf if 50 calves are sired. A **fully fertile** stock bull can achieve a **90% pregnancy rate after a nine week service period at a bull ratio of 1:50 cows**, assuming the cows are disease free and normally cycling. You should also aim to have **at least 60% of cows calve in the first three weeks** of the calving period. Published research often finds that around one in three stock bulls are unable to achieve this target, resulting in fewer cows getting in calf and a protracted calving period, resulting in a significant reduction in profitability. A bull breeding soundness examination aims to identify subfertile bulls in **advance** of the breeding season; sperm production takes around 8 weeks to complete so doing it **now** allows time to treat the subfertility if possible or arrange for a replacement bull.



The examination consists of a full physical exam by the vet. This includes body condition score, locomotion, the teeth, legs and feet, before moving onto the reproductive organs. Here, the prepuce and penis is examined for any damage or discharge, scrotal circumference measured (as size correlates with sperm production) and the testes palpated to ensure there are no abnormalities. Assuming no problems are found at this stage, an ejaculate will be taken by electro-ejaculation to examine sperm concentration and viability under the microscope. The cost of this is **£86.52+VAT for the first bull** and **£54.08+VAT for any subsequent bulls** examined at the same visit (+ visit charge). **In 2019 we performed 49 examinations and found 8 bulls unsuitable for breeding.**

The **heifer MOT** involves **pelvic measurement** and ensuring they are cycling ahead of breeding. 1 in 20 heifers have a small pelvis which can cause calving difficulties, 2 or 3 in 20 will be marginal. The pelvic width and height are measured with special calliper (pictured) and multiplied to give the pelvic cross-sectional area. This area, compared against the heifer's weight & age, provides the weight of a calf the heifer should be expected to calve without difficulties. **Why do this?** The short-term aim is to remove heifers with abnormally small or misshapen pelvises. These can then be fattened before ever entering the breeding herd, and avoid costly exercises such as caesarean sections or dead calves/injured heifers associated with difficult calvings. The long-term aim is to select away from breeding replacement heifers with narrow pelvises (highly heritable) and remove those genetics from the herd. For more information, speak to Jonathan, Elske or Roger.



We are currently dealing with our fourth case of dying lambs and ewes caused by tick borne diseases in the last 6 months. Half of these are NOT on the moor. Before now we have only rarely seen cases of this sort. We have already started seeing cases of Red Water in cattle as well. **Please ensure all stock is given a tick control medication and that this is regularly applied in line with the licence specific to your medication of choice.**



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