

FARM NEWSLETTER - MARCH 2018

Beef Cattle Growth Project

We recently had a look at synchronisation usage in beef cows within the practice using figures from one of the drug companies. It was no surprise to us that we use a lot less synchronisation programmes than other practices as the majority of our clients are not looking for a tight calving pattern. In fact talking about this with a local character I received the perfect quote to sum this up:

'I'm not interested in synchronisation, I'm not after a tight calving pattern as I don't have the space and it's about having something to sell every month for cash flow.' I may have cleaned it up a bit but other than that I think it sums up a lot of peoples' feelings!

With that in mind we wanted to look to see whether there were any benefits to its use other than the calving pattern. The most obvious one is that it allows the use of artificial insemination (A.I.) in a much easier way than looking for heats and serving ad hoc.

We could have looked at using easier calving bulls on the heifers or more motherly strains for replacement cows or even more extreme genetics for maximising beef yield. In the end we got greedy and decided to go for the best of both worlds.

We came up with a plan with the drug company, A.I. firm and a local farmer to synchronise half the herd and serve with an easy calving but fast growing Belgian Blue bull and use the farm's stock bull on the other half (also pure bred Belgian Blue with no history of calving problems over the previous three years). The cows were randomly selected for A.I. and randomly allocated feeding groups after calving.

There were no surprises in that the calving pattern was a lot tighter in the synchronisation group but also it had successfully treated some non-cyclic cows and so we had less geld cows as well.

The main thrust of the weighing results was that you can have your cake and eat it!

| | Birth weight | Growth per day | 100 day weight | 100 day gain |
|--------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Bull service | 43.62 Kg | 0.87 Kg | 133.75 Kg | 87.41 Kg |
| A.I. service | 42.08 Kg | 1.02Kg | 146.51 Kg | 104.3 Kg |
| Difference | - 1.54 Kg | 0.15 Kg/day | 12.76Kg | 16.89 Kg |

We were really impressed with these results, 4% lighter calves at birth, with a tighter range of weights and so a more predictable calving combined with 17% faster growth rates. The increased growth rate means that if the calves were sold at 100 days the increase in value of £39 would more than pay for the synchronisation and A.I. costs.

The higher growth rate was continuing well towards 200 days and there is no reason to suspect that it wouldn't carry on beyond that. If this rate did continue then these animals should be two months quicker to slaughter weight.

In summary with minimal changes to calving pattern, for example batching ten cows at a time, we used synchronisation and A.I. to have smaller and more predictable calves that were worth £39.00 more at 100 days.

Ian Illingworth

That's Orful!

Orf is a highly contagious disease primarily of sheep and goats, caused by a parapox virus. People working with infected sheep can also catch orf. Minor abrasions of the skin are required to establish infection, which is why flocks kept on rough grazing, or on pasture with a high proportion of thistles, can be particularly prone to the disease.

What are the symptoms of infection with orf?

Orf causes pustules and scabs to develop on non-woolly areas of the skin and occasionally in the mouth and throat. Invariably, affected animals lose weight and when orf lesions affect the teats of ewes, reduced sucking and mastitis are costly consequences. Discomfort caused by teat lesions means the ewe will often not allow the lamb to suck. As a result, lambs will try to steal milk from other ewes and this spreads infection further. When orf affects the udder and teats, one of the major consequences is acute bacterial mastitis. Orf lesions in young sucking lambs are usually confined to the mouth and nostrils, but occasionally extend into the mouth and throat. Mouth pain prevents feeding and lambs suffering from orf can die, usually due to a combination of dehydration and starvation. Secondary bacterial infections of orf lesions can make the condition more severe.



Where do sheep get orf from?

The orf virus can survive for many years in a dry environment, which is why more serious outbreaks are generally associated with intensive sheep systems where there is a build-up of infection in buildings. The virus is less likely to survive outside on wet pasture, consequently, carry over of infection on pasture from year to year is unlikely in the UK. The virus can survive on some sheep without causing disease. It is only when an abrasion to the skin occurs that the orf virus can enter the body and cause disease. Orf frequently appears in previously clean flocks after the introduction of new rams or ewes.

Protecting your flock from orf

In flocks that have never experienced orf, the aim should be to maintain disease-free status by carefully selecting replacements from known orf-free premises. Bought-in stock should be isolated from the main flock and examined for any signs of disease. In addition, practise good pasture management with the emphasis on controlling thistles.

What to do when faced with an orf outbreak

If you spot any cases of orf it is important to isolate the affected animals as soon as possible to prevent the spread of infection. Remember, orf is a virus so treatment generally delivers poor results. Antibiotics are only effective at treating secondary bacterial infections developing in the site of ulcers. Orf is self-limiting and if secondary infections are controlled, natural healing will occur in 24 to 28 days. Ill lambs should be fed artificially, with attention to hygiene of utensils.

Vaccination

Vaccination against orf can be used in flocks with known orf problems. As it is a live vaccination, it should NOT BE USED in flocks that have never experienced orf. Ewes should be vaccinated before disease is anticipated, but not during the last seven weeks of pregnancy. Vaccine is applied by scratching the bare skin under the front leg using the Scabivax applicator. Lambs can be vaccinated at any time from birth. It is important that lambs are vaccinated by scratching the skin between the top of the foreleg and chest wall. Do not vaccinate unweaned lambs in the groin because the animals can reach the scratch site with their mouths. If orf does strike older lambs, an important aspect of treatment is to vaccinate in-contact animals to reduce the percentage of lambs with disease. Vaccinated animals should not come into contact with unvaccinated animals for at least seven weeks after vaccination.

Becky Howard

CONGRATULATIONS TO ANNA ASHWORTH RVN, R-SQP, FARM VET TECH



Anna has been shortlisted out of 22,000 nominees as 1 of 3 finalists for the prestigious Petplan Veterinary Nurse of the Year Award! We are incredibly proud of Anna who works tirelessly and with great commitment towards promoting preventative health care on farm.

The finalists are judged by an impartial and independent panel of professionals in the veterinary field, from previous winners to presidents of veterinary associations. The judges are aware how challenging life in a veterinary practice can be and with their combined expertise and first hand experience they hope to choose a deserving winner who is dedicated to helping animals.

The award has been given to companion animal and equine nurses in the past, so we are rooting for Anna to win in order to turn the spotlight onto nursing within farm animal practice. We believe that the importance of Anna's role on farm is key to giving qualified advice and implementing practical strategies alongside your farm vet.

Well done Anna and good luck in the finals - 5th April 2018!



Vaccination Protocols for Cattle Prior to Turnout

At the time of writing this newsletter article, with snow on the ground and temperatures struggling to get above freezing due to the weather system known as the 'Beast from the East', turnout time for cattle seems a very long way off! It is however, time to start thinking about protecting cattle against infectious diseases they may encounter through the summer months.

In the spring, prior to turnout, is when the majority of breeding cattle are vaccinated against BVD and Leptospirosis. In addition to the single annual boosters for animals already in a vaccination system, previously unvaccinated animals may require a course of 2 injections approximately 4 weeks apart to become fully protected (Bovela BVD vaccine just requires a single injection followed by annual boosters). It is recommended to complete the initial vaccination course prior to service so consideration needs to be given to which animals are going to be served through the summer.



Farms that vaccinate heifer replacements against lungworm will also need to vaccinate calves over 2 months of age with 2 doses of Huskvac 4 weeks apart with the second dose being at least 2 weeks prior to turnout.

For further advice on the most appropriate vaccination programmes to use on your farm, which vaccines can be given at the same time and which worming products may be most appropriate after lungworm vaccination, please speak to one of the farm vets. Neil Roberts

Meetings Update!

5th Feb - Flock Club Lamb Post Mortems. A good turn out to Bentham Auction from members of Flock Club. Karen discussed care of neonatal lambs, the rise of antibiotic resistance in the lambing shed and how to perform an on farm post mortem on lambs that have died within the first few days of life. There was great discussion among the farmers regarding colostrum, joint ill and preventative antibiotic use.

Lamb cadavers were investigated for cause of death and we dissected a throat to show how a stomach tube passes down the oesophagus.

14th Feb - Practical Lambing on Valentines Night at Gisburn Auction!

Another good turnout for our popular lambing course. We discussed a range of topics including ewe management up to lambing, normal and abnormal lambing presentations and how to correct them and the importance of colostrum management.

A Lambing simulator was used to demonstrate lambing techniques while various problems that are regularly encountered were discussed. Lamb cadavers were used for the group to practice intraperitoneal injections (into the abdomen) and stomach tubing. The meeting was informal with lots of discussion within the group whilst receiving hands on practical learning.

#ColostrumIsGold

We discussed the importance of colostrum in our meetings. The #ColostrumIsGold campaign, created by the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance, is underlining that

responsible use of antibiotics starts with newborn calves, lambs and piglets receiving the right amount of colostrum within a couple of hours of birth – something all farmers have the potential to achieve.

#ColostrumIsGold

Some important things to remember:

- Colostrum supplies antibodies to the newborn which provides vital protection against disease. This can reduce or prevent the need for antibiotic treatments in the new-born or older animal.
- The new-born animal has little body fat, which means it is highly dependent on the fats and carbohydrates in colostrum as a source of energy to maintain body temperature and growth. Insufficient energy supply at birth can lead to hypothermia.
- Colostrum provides other nutrients, including: Vitamins A, D and E which help increase the absorptive and digestive capacity of the digestive system; enzymes and proteins which suppress growth of certain bacteria and contribute to the immune system.

Remember the 3 Q's, Quality, Quantity, Quickness

- **Calves:** Give a first feed of 4 litres or 10% of bodyweight within 4 or preferably 2 hours of birth; this should then be followed up by a further 2 litres within 12 hours of birth. A calf requires approximately 20 minutes of continuous suckling to consume enough colostrum in the first feed. Good quality cow colostrum has IgG levels of greater than 50mg/ml.

- **Lambs:** Rule of thumb is 210–290 ml/kg body weight, so a 5kg lamb at birth needs 1 litre of colostrum in its first 24 hours of life to give it essential levels of natural immunity. But importantly, **the first feed (of 50mls/kg bodyweight) should be within 2 hours of birth.**

Anna Ashworth

Abortion Control in Sheep

Any farm experiencing over 2% abortions or premature lambings is likely to have an infectious cause of abortion present. It should always be assumed that any ewe that aborts is potentially contagious to other sheep and to isolate her from other ewes and to remove any aborted lambs and afterbirths as soon as possible. Even if the flock is fully vaccinated against Enzootic abortion there are other infections such as *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella* which make isolation essential to prevent spread from ewe to ewe.

It is well worthwhile having samples taken from aborted lambs and afterbirths to determine the reason for the abortions as control measures vary depending on the cause. We have already had diagnosis of Enzootic abortion, *Toxoplasma* and *Salmonella* this year. Be aware that many of the causes of abortion in sheep can potentially infect humans as well and that strict hygiene measures such as wearing gloves should be observed when handling abortion material.

If you would like more information on abortion control please contact one of the farm vets on 01729 823538.

Neil Roberts

MSD's Calf Health Initiative

All dairy farmers would like to have a low incidence of disease (scours, pneumonias, joint ills etc.) in their calves and would like to see good weight gains pre-weaning (doubling the birthweight of the calf by 8 weeks of age) and yet on most farms these targets seem hard to achieve.

MSD have introduced a national Calf Health Initiative to encourage vets and farmers to work more closely together to monitor and improve calf health through a detailed assessment of the calf rearing enterprise.

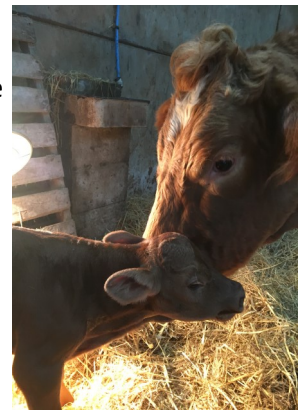
The assessment is split into 5 sections:

1. Setting goals and measuring for increased productivity
2. Practical colostrum management
3. Top tips for youngstock nutrition
4. Lowering infection pressure
5. Optimising the environment for improved health

The on farm assessment will identify both the strengths and places where improvements can be made in your calf rearing enterprises. Anna and the farm vets have now carried out the initial training programme and we feel that most farms would benefit from a visit to carry out a Calf Health Assessment.

For more information about what is involved, please contact the surgery.

Neil Roberts



PARCELS FOR COLLECTION AT GISBURN AUCTION MART

A member of the farm team is available at our Gisburn Auction Mart Office every Thursday between 10am—12noon and your parcels can be sent there for collection during this time.

We politely request however, that all orders for parcels to be delivered to Gisburn are rung in to the surgery by 3pm on Wednesday. This ensures that we have enough time to have items authorised by the vet and the parcel correctly dispensed in time for delivery. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

GDPR is coming - ready or not!

You may be aware that the laws regarding data protection are changing. To many of us this is of very little interest! However, we need to let you know that after 25th May 2018 we will no longer be able to send you information (like this monthly newsletter) without your **explicit consent**. Explicit consent is you 'opting in' to receive post, text messages and emails from us rather than us assuming that you are happy to do so unless you tell us otherwise. To this end we will be asking you to complete a simple tick box form at front desk indicating your agreed contact preferences with us.

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