RCVS ACCREDITED PRACTICE
24 hour dedicated farm cover

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FARM ANIMAL NEWSLETTER - OCTOBER 2025

COLD CALF CARE

As we start to get into the colder months of the year, we should start to be aware of the potential negative impact of the temperature on our calves. As the calves expend more energy to stay warm this can decrease their **growth rates** and also make them more susceptible to **pneumonia**.

The thermal comfort zone is the temperature range where a calf doesn't need extra energy to warm up their body. If we start to dip below this then it may start to negatively impact their growth rates. To minimise this, we have the following areas of prevention:

Milk consumption: As more energy is burnt to keep warm, we must feed the calves more to compensate for this. **Calves will require an extra 50 g/day of milk replacer (0.33 litres/day of whole milk) for each 5°C temperature drop below 15°C.** It also may be beneficial to think about feeding milk to calves three times a day to maintain energy levels and no more than 12 hours should pass between feeds.

Environment: An easy way to reliably assess daily temperature is to use a digital **thermometer** installed at calf height that records the max and min readings. Make sure that calf pens are dry and bedding is deep enough to allow them to nest. This also means having good drainage/regular mucking out to reduce any damp bedding. Fresh air is needed but it's critical to ensure that it's not too stale or too draughty, both extremes have health risks (assess this with smoke bombs). **Look out for calves lying down more than normal, avoiding one area of the pen, or huddling around the edges, shivering or hair standing up.** Installing ventilation units or even makeshift draught excluders or wind breakers can greatly help reduce this risk.

Calf Jackets: These can be an **additional** step to improve calf comfort if they are used effectively. You must ensure that the calves are dry before putting the jacket on (especially if newborn) and regularly check to ensure that the jackets are clean and dry. If bedding is damp, the jackets may become damp as well. Ensure jackets are snug, and the calf still has full range of movement. The main risk of calf jackets would be the potential for disease spread - especially **cryptosporidium**. To minimise this risk, regularly replace the jackets when soiled clean thoroughly with a licenced **disinfectant and wash at 60°C** to ensure

SHEEP - LIVER FLUKE

There may be some of you thinking about fluke doses this next month, the wet colder weather is making a return, and you may be wondering whether it's a job to be done before the tups are loosed.

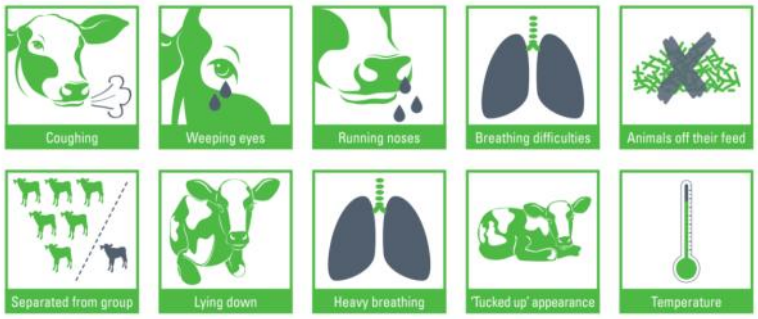
As yet we haven't had any positive reports for new season fluke. So, what should we do?

- Test first season grazing lambs using antibody blood tests. This will tell us if new immature fluke has emerged.
- Check that adult stock (ewes and tups) were cleared out from mature fluke.
- Collect samples from at least 10 sheep per group for faecal egg or coproantigen testing.
- Investigate dead sheep and bring fresh ones down for a postmortem.
- Discuss treatments and your farm risk with a vet.

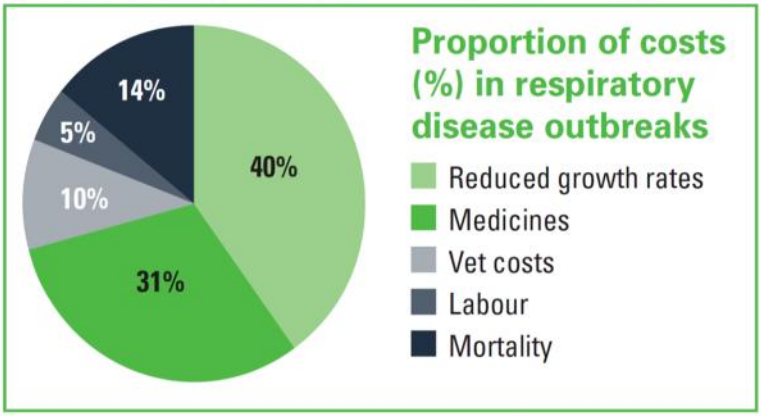
Those of you who are currently taking advantage of the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway. As part of the Endemic disease follow up, you can choose to test for fluke under the Ewe Condition or Lamb Performance packages. To discuss, please contact the surgery.

CALF PNEUMONIA

Pneumonia is the most common cause of poor growth and death in growing calves, costing between **£30-£80 per calf but increases to £500+** if the animal dies. These costs usually come in the form of poor food conversion and reduced Daily Live Weight Gain. As it is a big issue to the industry, we need to be able to recognise the potential risk factors so we can control the disease the best we can.



- **Colostrum**: Poor quality/quantity can leave them at a higher risk for disease
- **Environment**: Temperature, poor ventilation can spread disease quickly between calves, over ventilated and draughts can also cause increased risk of pneumonia, shared airspaces and damp bedding can play a role in increased pathogen load in the environment
- **Stress**: Transport, overstocking/bullying, mixing groups, overhandling, weaning, procedures (e.g. disbudding, castrating) can cause increased stress and disease susceptibility.
- Other concurrent **illnesses** can increase the susceptibility for respiratory disease.



Calves can have lung lesions on ultrasound even before clinical signs are present. But normally the first indication would be a raised temperature. After this the more notable signs appear - coughing, extra respiratory effort, nasal discharge, depressed, visibly off feed etc.

Pneumonia prevention can often be cheaper than the outbreak management and production loss. As well as husbandry alterations to improve the risk factors above, it also possible to **vaccinate for bovine respiratory diseases** in calves.

There are intranasal or injectable options for the first few weeks old that can cover for the main risks at this age - RSV, PI3 +/- *M.Haemolytica*. As they grow older there are other vaccination courses that can cover BVD and IBR as well to ensure the risks of respiratory disease is kept to a minimum.

In the event of a respiratory outbreak **treatment is based on the type of infection** present so it is important to know if it bacterial or viral in nature. Viral infections tend to need supportive treatment as antibiotics aren't effective, unless there is a secondary bacterial infection present. Infected calves should at least receive an anti-inflammatory (e.g Metacam), potential isolation or group treatment if multiple in a group are affected. For more information, please contact the surgery and speak to one of our farm vets.

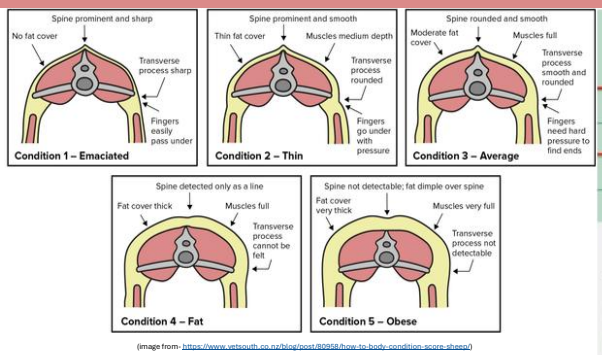
CALF SCOUR TESTING

We've tested quite a few calf scour samples this month. Crypto remains one of the most popular causes. There are several ways to help reduce the risk but when you are flat out calving and there are calves everywhere time can be short to come by. If you're going to target something, make colostrum management a priority. Aiming to keep it simple, follow the **5Q's**.

- **Quantity**: Feed the right amount of colostrum. 10% of calf bodyweight in colostrum within 2hrs of birth. Followed by the same again within 12hrs.
- **Quality**: Use colostrum that's high in iGg concentration. Use a brix refractometer to check the quality. You want 22% on the scale, which is at least 50g iGg per litre.
- **Quickly:** Feed as soon as possible after birth.
- **SQueaky clean**: Ensure collecting and feeding equipment is clean. It should be cleaned and disinfected between uses.
- **Quantify:** Test calves for immunity transfer. Ideally between 24-36h old (can be up to 7d old). This is a quick blood test that costs £5.30 +vat. A Vet Tech can visit your farm and take the samples, there is a charge for this service.

For more information, please contact the surgery.

SHEEP BCS CONTROL



(image from- https://www.vetsouth.co.nz/blog/post/80958/how-to-body-condition-score-sheep)

Body condition targets

	Hill ewes	Upland ewes	Lowland ewes
At weaning	2	2	2.5
At tupping	2.5	3	3.5
Mid-pregnancy	2	2.5	3
At lambing	2	2.5	3

BCS targets as a guide to feeding management before mating/tupping and throughout pregnancy.

As we head back into the tupping and pregnancy period, it's a great time to take a closer look at the body condition of your sheep. Body Condition Scoring (BCS) involves feeling the fat and muscle cover over the lumbar spine to determine the health and condition of the sheep on a **scale from 1-5**. Physical palpation is more accurate than visual inspection alone — fleece and breed build can be deceptive.

Getting ewes to the right condition score at the right stage of the year is essential, as being either too fat or too thin can have negative effects on **production and health**. Breed also plays a role, with hill breeds typically managed at a slightly lower target score than lowland breeds.

Flushing ewes before tupping and increasing the BCS to the target level can have positive effects on ovulation rates and fertility. But make sure that there are no other reasons for poor BCS such as **dental problems, lameness, or concurrent disease** as these can all reduce feed intake and prevent sheep from reaching target condition, even when the rest of the flock is thriving.

The Risks of Overweight (High BCS)

- Pregnancy **Toxaemia**: Caused by reduced feed intake in late pregnancy
- **Prolapse** risk increased
- **Dystocia** (difficult lambing)
- **Reduced rumen space:** fat ewes eat less, leading to metabolic problems
- **Cast ewes:** more likely to become stuck on their backs
- Tups have reduced **semen quality** and may have more difficulty mating.

The Risks of Underweight (Low BCS)

- **Slower reproductive cycles**: taking longer to come into season
- **Reduced ovulation rates**
- **Increased barren rates** and pregnancy loss
- Pregnancy **Toxaemia**
- **Poor colostrum**: quantity/ quality
- **Weaker lambs**
- **Supressed immunity**: more prone to other disease

RUMEN FLUKE

Over the past few years rumen fluke has been slowly expanding its territory up the country as the climate gets warmer and wetter. This is a disease that was unheard of in this county until 2011, and is becoming more common in both cattle and sheep.

The clinical impact of this disease is thought to be low and the standard advice is that a diagnosis of rumen fluke in an animal is unlikely to be important and that treatment should not be done. That said there are two important reasons why this advice may change over the coming years:

1. The range of the rumen fluke is expanding to a point where the whole of the UK is likely to be capable of supporting it through the winter months and so infection will pass from year to year.
2. The standard treatments for liver fluke and gut worms, whether these are targeted as part of a SCOPS/COWS protocol or a traditional blanket treatment once a year or at drying off, doesn't work and so the disease can become established in new areas very quickly after arrival.

The rumen fluke has a very similar life cycle to liver fluke in that it needs an intermediate host of a mud snail. The snail is a different species (although there is some cross over) and the metacercaria (larval stage) of the fluke need to be laid on submerged herbage, so the conditions need to be wetter than for liver fluke (slightly).

The disease has two distinct forms, the mature rumen fluke sit on the papillae of the rumen feeding on blood and are well tolerated even in large numbers. The immature fluke feed in the duodenum and ileum of the small intestine and can cause dullness and dehydration, severe watery scour and rapid weight loss, anaemia leading to blood and protein loss and bottle jaw. This would tend to be in younger age groups and is thought to be very rare. So whilst the advice has to remain that you shouldn't treat off the back of high numbers of eggs in routine samples, there are some things we should be doing.

Biosecurity: Worm egg counting and fluke testing bought in animals before quarantine dosing is helpful as we may need to treat for rumen fluke as well, to prevent importing the disease.

Exposure: Rumen fluke needs warm (4 weeks minimum at 17 degrees Celsius) and very wet (submerged herbage) conditions, so keeping cattle away from watercourses is an effective control method.

Dose: There is only oxyclozanide (92-97%) in cattle and sheep with the addition of closantel (83-85%) in sheep that is effective against this parasite and so we need to be very protective of this dose. The best advice is to only spot treat clinically affected animals after a definitive diagnosis has been made. The safety margin for these products is not large either and there have been cases of stock going blind after relatively small overdose. Accurate dosing according to weight needs to be done to minimise problems and reduce the risk of resistance developing. For further information please contact the practice.

COBALT SUPPLEMENTS & B12 INJECTION

The clinical signs associated with trace element deficiency in sheep are often gradual, subtle but have very harmful effects. Although deficiencies can be seen at any point of the year it is now when increasing numbers of ill thrift lambs start to surface. There are huge interactions between parasitic gastroenteritis (PGE) and trace element deficiency therefore obtaining information about both is essential to enable the farmer and vet to deal with both problems efficiently.

Cobalt has an important biological role as a component of vitamin B12 which is made by micro-organisms in the first stomach. Cobalt deficiency (pine) occurs where there are low soil cobalt concentrations which may be further complicated by an internal parasitic burden which causes diarrhoea, thereby interfering with the absorption of vitamin B12.

Clinical signs of cobalt deficiency are most commonly observed in weaned lambs at pasture during late summer/autumn. Signs include lethargy, reduced appetite, poor quality wool with an open fleece, small size and poor body condition despite adequate nutrition. There may be tear staining of the cheeks, and pale mucous membranes (eyes) develop after several months. Cobalt-deficient sheep may fail to respond well to vaccinations and be more susceptible to clostridial diseases (for example pulpy kidney) and pasteurellosis (pneumonia). In severe cases of cobalt deficiency, lambs present with nervous signs including depression, head pressing, and aimless wandering. Cobalt deficiency is much less common in adults but is reported to cause reduced fertility and poor mothering ability but these signs may be more related to generalised low body condition scores.

Diagnosis is based upon clinical signs in areas with known cobalt-deficient soils, as in our region, supported by specific diagnostic tests including blood sampling. A minimum of 10 blood samples is recommended to determine the mean plasma vitamin B12 concentration. This testing can be part of the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway Endemic Disease follow up.

Prevention and treatment can be sourced in several methods. Oral drench supplementation is cheap, however it should be administered monthly to deliver sufficient levels for growing lambs. Some trace element drenches are better than others, so it is well worth discussing with a vet which would be of greater benefit. There are multiple trace element boluses on the market so again it is worth a conversation with one of our farm vets to ensure that what your are administering will deliver what you need and for the length of time you require. Many of you will be familiar with B12 injections Troy & Smartshot. Both products have been unavailable BUT we have sourced an alternative which we hope to have in stock mid-late October! This will again be on a special import certificate.

HIGH LUNGWORM RISK

Lungworm is a common parasite that mainly affects **youngstock or naive cows** that have not built-up immunity through previous exposure or vaccination. Problems are most often seen in the **autumn in grazing animals**, when wet weather helps spread larvae from poo onto the pasture. It takes roughly 3-4 weeks from ingestion for adults to develop in the trachea and clear clinical signs to present.

Typical signs of infection include an intermittent or persistent cough, nasal discharge, or frothy mouth, and increased respiratory rate and effort, in severe cases it can cause death. Beyond the obvious respiratory concerns, lungworm can also lead to production losses, such as reduced DLWG, lower milk yields, and in some cases, poorer conception rates. Severe lungworm outbreaks in growing cattle result in reduced weight gains costing **£50–£100 per animal**, while in susceptible dairy animals, milk production may decrease by £3 per cow per day (or at least £140 per cow).

Diagnosis can be made in several ways: Adult worms may be found on post-mortem examination in trachea and lungs, larvae can be detected in **faecal samples**, and **blood or bulk milk** antibody testing can indicate exposure within the herd.

Prevention is far better than cure, vaccinating calves or other naïve animals with **Huskvac** is strongly recommended. This involves two oral doses given four weeks apart, with the course completed at least **two weeks before turnout** to provide effective protection.

If clinical signs are seen in susceptible animals and lungworm is confirmed, prompt treatment with an **appropriate wormer** is essential and ideally move to a clean pasture to prevent reinfection. Early action can help limit long-term damage and prevent further spread within the herd.

To discuss lungworm, please speak to a member of the farm animal team.