

ACORN POISONING



The noble oak tree (*Quercus* spp) is a common sight in the fields of Monmouthshire providing valuable shade and protection to grazing livestock. However, young oak leaves in the spring, and acorns in the autumn are particularly rich in tannins which are toxic to susceptible animals. All ruminants are at risk, but most cases of acorn poisoning are seen in sheep, and dairy or beef youngstock.

Whilst animals seem able to tolerate small quantities of acorns, ingestion of large numbers can lead to illness and death. Initial symptoms of acorn poisoning are typically depression, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, excessive thirst and constipation. Later, animals will develop a profuse diarrhoea leading to dehydration. Most die from kidney failure within four and seven days of ingestion. Sometimes deaths will occur more suddenly, and on post-mortem examination, the rumen (1st stomach) will be full of several kilograms of acorns.

Treatment with intravenous and oral fluids can help to treat mildly affected animals, but in general the kidney damage is irreversible and untreatable. Sometimes the clinical signs of diarrhoea, weakness and depression can be confused with a heavy internal parasite burden, particularly if groups of young animals are affected. Your vet can carry out blood and faecal tests to determine the cause and prognosis.

The acorn crop varies from year to year; every 5 to 10 years there is a 'mast year' when a bumper crop of acorns is seen. A mast year will occur after a warm, dry spring allows good pollination of oak flowers. The last mast year in the UK was 2020, according to the Woodland Trust.

Although the acorn crop this year is not excessive, some trees are very heavily laden with acorns and the risk to grazing livestock is high, due to the drought conditions and shortage of grass. In such conditions, livestock will look to alternative forms of feed and acorns appear to be very palatable to some animals. The drought conditions have led to some acorns falling early, but if there is an autumn storm a heavy fall can be expected. If the acorns fall onto bare ground, they will be a tempting form of food to hungry animals.

Preventing access to acorns is not always straightforward as many farms have several large oak trees in every field. Fencing off areas under trees is sometimes possible, but these areas need to be fenced for long periods, as acorns will maintain their high tannin levels and toxicity for many weeks. Some farmers will roll acorns into the ground with a heavy roller, others will spread farmyard manure over the worst areas. But in many cases, there is no way to avoid the acorns, so it is a matter of sharing the load between as many animals as possible and providing another palatable source of feed such as silage, so that the animals are not forced to scavenge for acorns to supplement their diet.

Free Sheep Scab Testing

Examination of skin scrape samples from sheep on Welsh farms showing suspect clinical signs of sheep scab is now being offered free of charge all year round. The scheme, supported by Welsh Government, will encourage the diagnosis of sheep scab, which is a prerequisite for the appropriate treatment and successful control of this disease. There will be a charge for taking and posting the samples, but the lab fees will be covered by the scheme. If you have any itchy sheep in your flock, make sure that you give the correct treatment by getting the correct diagnosis.

Look Out for Signs of Notifiable Diseases in Pigs

The threat of African Swine Fever (ASF) or Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) being introduced to the UK remains as real as ever with countries in different parts of the world affected with outbreaks of these diseases. FMD has been detected in Indonesia this year, a country that was previously FMD-free (without vaccination). Failure to detect and control the initial clinical cases led to the rapid spread of the disease across five main islands, including Bali. An outbreak assessment was published by APHA's International Disease. There are images of FMD in pigs on this link: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/eufmd/albums>.



ASF outbreaks continue in Europe, Asia and the Caribbean. Humans are believed to be playing a significant role in introducing ASF into new areas, likely by moving ASF-infected pork or wild boar meat/meat products to unaffected

areas, which are then consumed by pigs or wild boar. There are images of the clinical signs and pathology of ASF on this link: <http://apha.defra.gov.uk/documents/surveillance/diseases/african-swine-fever-images.pdf>

Please can we advise any pig-keeping clients to be strict regarding your unit biosecurity, address any weaknesses and let us know if you have any disease concerns in your pigs, including lameness. Any suspicion of notifiable disease must be promptly reported to APHA <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/notifiable-diseases> Importantly, pig keepers and the public should be reminded that it is illegal to feed pigs meat or meat products, and kitchen or catering waste. Doing so endangers the health of the pigs and risks introducing exotic diseases, such as foot and mouth disease or African swine fever, into the country. Useful biosecurity information and posters can be found at <https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/biosecurity-on-pig-farms>

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Sheep-focused Antibiotic Resistance Workshop

Thursday, 13th October at 7pm
Mon. Livestock Market NP15 2BH

Small Grants - Efficiency Demonstration Day

Friday, 21st October at 10am
Llanover Estate NP7 9ES

NADIS BVD Workshop

Thursday, 10th November at 12pm
Mon. Livestock Market NP15 2BH

Please contact the office to book your FREE place - 01873 840167 or visit our website for more details

Usk Show

We had a very successful day at the show and were visited by lots of clients who enjoyed our refreshments in the glorious sunshine.

Our popular 'Bucket Challenge' photo competition was repeated, and our winner was Mr Nigel Phillips, Blackmeadows Farm who won a Castle Farm Shop



hamper, kindly donated by Boehringer Ingelheim. The raffle, in aid of RABI and DPJ Foundation, raised over £400. A big thanks to all companies that donated prizes. We also had a children's colouring competition. We were originally going to award one prize (kindly donated by Carrs Billington), but we had so many amazing entries we decided to give out five teddies instead!

Well done to all the children who took part.



Investigation of Thin Ewes

There have been thin ewes on many farms this summer, due to the lack of grass. Now that we have had some rain and they are on better grass, their response should be assessed over the next 6 to 8 weeks. It is possible for thin ewes to gain a whole-body condition score in 8 weeks. This is equivalent to a liveweight gain of between 100 and 150g/day and is conditional on them being provided with good quality grass with a minimum sward height of 4cm.

A useful link to a simple guide to ewe body condition scoring can be found here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KoRzvA-cfY&feature=player_embedded

Ewes that fail to gain weight for no obvious reason may have an underlying disease issue and can be useful sentinels for the presence (or absence) of iceberg diseases in a flock. The euthanasia and postmortem examination of a group of 2 to 4 thin ewes that are not fit for sale is a cost-effective way of screening for conditions such as OPA, Maedi Visna and Johnes disease.

Consideration should also be given to flocks joining the MV and Johnes monitoring schemes which requires 12 or 20 thin ewes to be sampled annually. Find out more at the SRUC website: www.sruc.ac.uk

Please get in touch if you would like to discuss the submission of thin ewes or sample collection.

