



FARM FIRST VETS

Newsletter February 2021

IMPORTANT NOTICE

From now on, all clients MUST ring in advance to order their medicines - This is for several reasons. Firstly, we are still working with Covid -19 restrictions and we want to reduce the time people have to wait outside the building in the cold. Secondly, most of our products are prescription-only medicines, which means that a vet has to prescribe them. The office staff may need to check with a vet whether you can have the medicines that you have asked for, particularly if they are antibiotics and in large amounts, and we do not always have a vet available. Thirdly, pre- ordering will mean we have sufficient stock for you, and potentially save you a wasted journey.

COVID PROCEDURES - We ask that all clients coming to the surgery wear a mask when they are consulting with our staff. We have a variety of ways to deal with sheep to reduce contact between the farmer and the vet. These include tying the sheep up with a halter in the trailer, using hurdles, tying them to our lambing tables or using members of our team to hold them if necessary. We are keen to keep both our clients and our staff safe whilst looking after the livestock, so please keep your distance and follow any instructions that we give.

IMPROVING CALF SURVIVAL - With calving fast approaching for many suckler herds, it is worth reviewing the factors that affect the performance of calves. One of the SAC residents, Rachel Bragg, has been tracking the health and survival of over 1,000 calves born on 84 GB farms in 2018. In her study, around 1 in 6 of the calves required at least some assistance at birth. As you would expect, being born to a heifer, being a twin, being sired by a Charolais bull and being male were all risk factors for calves requiring



assistance. What was surprising from her data was that calves that were born to cows that were classified as thin (under condition score 2.5 out of 5.0) were nearly twice as likely to require assistance at calving than calves born to cows who were classified as being in ideal body condition (2.5-3.5 out of 5.0). There is some evidence from dairy cows that body condition loss in late pregnancy increases the number of cows that require assistance at calving, and it is interesting to see this association between thin cows and calving assistance in suckler cows. In a separate analysis of the same calves,

assistance at calving was identified as a significant risk factor or failing to absorb sufficient colostral antibodies (i.e. failure of passive transfer), and that these calves with poor colostral antibodies are significantly more likely to require antibiotic treatment or die prior to weaning.

So how can we make use of this information to improve calf survival this calving season?



1.Go and body condition score your cows now. Spring calving cows that are under body condition score 2.5 out of 5.0 should be grouped together and provided with supplementary feed.

2.If the cows are still more than two months away from calving, you could attempt some controlled body condition loss for fat cows. However, no attempt should be made to reduce body condition in the last month of pregnancy.

3.If you have cows scanned with twins, group them with your thin cows so that they can also benefit from additional feeding.

4.Pay particular attention to these thin and twin carrying cows at calving time – they are significantly more likely to require help.

5.Don't risk colostrum supply at calving. If you've calved a cow, strip off all her colostrum and feed it to the calf using a bottle or stomach tube. If there is less than 4 litres, supplement the calf with colostrum from another cow of known good disease status.

OVINE PLANT POISONING January is the most common month for deaths due to plant poisoning to be diagnosed in sheep therefore something to look out for in the next few weeks. Occasionally animals present with signs of abdominal pain, bruxism and regurgitation but more often are found dead suddenly. Poor grass availability and snowfall in winter months are likely to encourage animals to stray and seek alternative forage. Sheep that are wintered away on other holdings should be kept from straying by ensuring fencing is secure and supplementary forage provided if snow cover remains. Rhododendron and its relative Pieris (see photo) are the most common causes of plant toxicity. Cases of bracken, oak and ragwort poisoning are sporadic and tend to be more chronic in nature. Post mortem examination is the diagnostic method of choice and can easily be carried both on farm or at a post mortem centre. Discovery of even a few leaves of a known poisonous plant in the rumen is diagnostic. Please get in touch to let us know about cases and for support where further testing may be necessary.



A SHORT TAIL....Recently a few of our vets have noticed ewes with extremely short docked tails. If tails are to be docked it is a legal requirement that the tail should be long enough to cover the anus in male lambs and the anus and vulva in females (see diagram). Excessively short tails in breeding ewes have been linked with an increase in vaginal prolapses. Tail docking must be performed in lambs under 7 days old and it is advisable to ensure that they are over 1 day old to prevent any interruption of colostrum intake. Tail docking is known to be painful and although no legal requirement to administer local anaesthetic it would be worth administering a painkiller such as Metacam.

SATURDAY MORNINGS - During the lambing period the office will be open on Saturday mornings from 08.30am to 12.30pm. This will start on Saturday 6th February and go through until 24th April.

STAFF NEWS - We are sorry to tell you that Jose Irazo, one of our Spanish TB testers has decided to return to Spain to pursue his career at home. Jose has become a very popular member of our team and we wish him well in the future.

JOKE - (Thanks to Paul Price of Gelliargwellt Farm for this one) - A farmer comes in from a hard day's work and takes a seat in front of the fire. His wife asks from the kitchen – 'Would you like anything to eat?' 'What are the options asks the farmer?' 'Yes or no!!' shouts the wife!