FARM FIRST NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2023

FLOCK MOT's - EWE FOCUS

The end of the summer is a great time to reflect on the past lambing season and to be thinking about how to improve for the next one. Selecting your breeding stock ahead of tupping is essential to prepare for the year ahead. One aim to focus on may be to improve scanning rates. This year, scanning rates were down 20% on average across farms in the area compared to previous years. This is primarily due to nutrition problems caused by the drought last summer. However, there are other causes of poor performance. As a result, it is important to assess and select your ewes to limit these other causes using the following indicators. How do we select ewes for the upcoming season?

- **Checking Body Condition Score (BCS)** regularly is useful throughout the year. Pre-tupping, a ewe's BCS should be around 3-3.5 out of 5 depending on the breed. Low BCS or thin ewes may be an indication of underlying issues within the flock such as nutritional deficiencies or parasitism.
- **Assessing udder and teat conformation** and functionality is another important tool in assessing if the ewe will be able to raise the lambs. Hard udders, lumps, or ewes with a history of mastitis and only one working quarter are unlikely to be able to feed the lambs appropriately.
- **Teeth** are a good indicator of age and whether the ewe can feed herself. This includes the teeth at the back of the mouth. They can be felt by running fingers along the back of the jaw. Ewes with broken mouths are less likely to be able to maintain body condition.
- **Chronic lameness** affects performance of the flock. Repeat offenders and chronically lame ewes should be culled. The AHDB 5-point plan to reduce lameness is a great reference point.
- **Disease and poor performance** 'Iceberg' diseases affect production and are usually seen as ill-thrift in middle-aged ewes. These include Johne's, OPA, Maedi Visna, and Border disease. Testing can be carried out when there is a high barren rate at scanning or chronically thin sheep. If the adult death rate is more than 5% then investigations should be carried out.
- **Abortions** can be caused by infectious diseases such as ***Toxoplasma gondii*** and ***Chlamydophila abortus*** but, sometimes the cause is not identified. As a result, barren and aborted ewes may also be chosen for involuntary culling.
- Ewes with a history of **prolapse and poor mothering** should also be culled as they are likely to do it again next year. These ewes should be permanently marked with a tag or ear notch at the time of the problem, so that they can be identified after weaning.
- **Next steps?** Other things worth thinking about during tupping are vaccinations (Toxovax®/Cevac®) and forage analysis to prevent nutritional deficiencies. In addition to checking the ewes, it is also important to ensure that the rams are performing.

FARMING CONNECT FUNDING

There is a new **Farming Connect Scheme** up and running, with considerable sums of money available to each registered farm. Animal Health is one of the areas that can be subsidised, with **70% funding** available to help improve productivity on the farm. This can be used to look at issues such as fertility, mastitis, parasite control, specific disease testing or any other production issue on dairy, beef and sheep farms. The annual health plan can be included as part of the package and up to 3 packages are available per farm over two years. **For more information please call the office and speak to one of the vets.**

NEW CALF SCOUR VACCINE

As part of our calf health strategy, we have reviewed the vaccines we prescribe and have decided to move across to Fencovis® from Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health.

A **2 ml single-dose intramuscular injection of Fencovis® administered to the dam 12 to 3 weeks before calving** prevents calf diarrhoea caused by bovine rotavirus and *E. coli K99*, while reducing the incidence and severity of disease caused by bovine coronavirus. Adjuvants are used in killed vaccines to help stimulate a good immune response. The adjuvant in Fencovis® is oil-free for optimal safety and reduced lumps at the injection site. Fencovis® is available in 1, 5 and 25 dose packs, so it's flexible to use, however many animals you need to vaccinate.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Beef Up Your Fertility

On-Farm Meeting

11am - 4pm

Thursday 17th August

By kind invitation from Nigel Phillips, Blackmeadows, Llantilio Crossenny NP7 8SR

How to improve herd performance - economics, genetics, AI and synchronisation, plus ways to deal with problem cows.

Refreshments provided

Please contact the office to book your place.

HAVE YOU HEARD OF Q FEVER?

It is a disease caused by the bacterium *Coxiella burnetti*, which can infect many animals, including cattle, sheep and goats. It is a zoonotic disease and can affect humans, with those that work closely with ruminants being most at risk.

Signs of Q fever It is mainly asymptomatic. However, when clinical signs occur in a herd, **Q fever primarily affects reproductive performance in cattle and presents a serious threat to productivity.** Clinical signs in cattle include abortion, infertility (poor conception or increased calving interval), metritis (inflammation of the uterus), retained placenta, stillbirth and weak newborn calves. Clinical signs in goats and sheep also include abortion.

Transmission & prevalence Infection is generally through inhalation of the bacteria which is shed in large numbers most commonly at parturition (placenta and birth fluids) but also shed in faeces, milk and vaginal mucous. It is endemic in GB dairy farms with studies showing positive bulk milk samples ranging from 70% PCR positive in south-west England to 80% ELIZA positive results across 255 UK herds. We have seen positive results in some of our dairy herds.

Diagnosis There are several options for diagnosing Q fever in livestock, including serology and a bulk milk tank PCR test called the Q Test, however the clinical picture in a herd infected with *Coxiella burnetti* is complex, can be confused by other factors and is often subclinical, making diagnosis a challenge for vets and farmers.

What else do we know about Q fever? The bacterium is particularly resilient and can survive for extended periods of time in the environment. For example, up to five months in soil and up to two years at minus 20oC. It is also resistant to many commonly used disinfectants. Along with environmental persistence, *Coxiella burnetii* can be spread on the wind. An outbreak seen in the Netherlands (2007–10) was linked to a 75-fold increase in goat numbers seen in the preceding 25 years. The bacterium thrives in dry environments and rain has a negative impact on the distribution.

What if you have Q fever on your farm? Biosecurity is important to reduce the risk of spreading Q fever on farms. Vaccination is also available.

- Investigate all livestock abortions.
- Keep a good level of hygiene in areas where birthing takes place. Ensure placentas and birth materials are hygienically disposed of.
- Protect yourself - wear disposable obstetric gloves and coveralls.
- Avoid disinfecting with high-pressure sprays (aerosols).
- Be aware of weather conditions when spreading muck or slurry.
- Ask about vaccination for Q fever

Human health risk Q fever is zoonotic and infection usually occurs through inhalation of dust or aerosols containing the organism. 60% of human Q fever infections will remain asymptomatic. When symptoms are seen, most people will have a flu-like syndrome with a small number needing hospitalisation for lung disease, hepatitis or meningitis. **If infected when pregnant, women may suffer from abortions or preterm births.**

As usual, we will be at Usk Show on Sat 9th September. Pop along for a chat and some refreshments - our stand is near the cattle lines.

* * * STAFF NEWS * * *

We are sorry to say the Dragos, our TB tester has decided to return to clinical practice and his time with us has ended sooner than planned, due to a family bereavement. Our thoughts are with him at this sad time. We wish him all the best for his future career.