

## LATE WINTER NEWSLETTER 2012



Welcome to another edition of the practice newsletter –at least we are not frozen up this year! After a very wet start to the year the weather has finally settled and we can all finally start looking forward to spring. We are continuing with the development of our Neath site large animal stable block and our car park has already dramatically improved access and parking for stock vehicles.

Over on the continent a new disease threat has emerged named “schmallenberg” virus (easier to pronounce after several pints!), midges again seem to be involved in its transmission. No cases have been recorded in the UK and the clinical symptoms are varied but include the production of “ bulldog” calf and lamb deformities and nervous deficits producing “dummy” calves and lambs .Examinations carried out at the local VLA in Carmarthen on suspicious cases for the virus will be free of charge-please inform us of any unusual presentations of deformed foetuses on your farms this springtime.

Please make every effort to attend our next stock club meeting to be held on;

**WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 1<sup>ST</sup> AT 7.30PM**

**NEATH RFC CLUBHOUSE GNOLL PARK ROAD NEATH**

**“THE ROLE OF VACCINATION IN MAXIMISING YOUR CALF CROP POTENTIAL”**

**“PAIN MANAGEMENT IN YOUR STOCK – ARE YOU DOING ENOUGH?”**

**“TOP TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CALVING AND LAMBING PERIOD”**

**\*\*\*\*BUFFET PROVIDED\*\*\***

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## CATTLE NEWS

Cattle on the whole seem to have fared well over the winter period with a lot of good quality silage on farm. **CONDITION SCORE YOUR COWS NOW FOR SPRING CALVING.** Suckler cows should calve down in the spring with a condition score of no less than 2, be prepared to offer extra care to those first calvers and cows under condition at calving. Remember that 2/3 of the growth of the calf occurs in the last 1/3 of pregnancy period, overconditioned cows have difficult calvings. Conversely if they are too thin colostrum quality and calf viability will be reduced and subsequent infertility can be a problem. Make sure you are prepared for calving with adequate supplies of colostrum, iodine for navel dressing, clean calving ropes, and medicines. For those of you calving indoors the provision of well designed clean calving pens is essential and make sure the cows udder is cleaned before the calf sucks!

Despite the mild weather and larger temperature changes we have seen few outbreaks of calf pneumonia in single suckled calf units over the inter period. Vaccination of bucket calves against the major causes of viral pneumonia is now advised on all such units we visit, these calves are often under more stress and receive no immunity in their mothers milk unlike their single suckled counterparts. Remember that we have access to a subsidised blood testing scheme to investigate calf pneumonia outbreaks on your farm.

We have been exceptionally busy over the last month carrying out bull fertility testing which is unusual for this time of the year, we are consistently picking up sub fertile bulls often purchased at large expense from the big sales—we recommend all newly purchased bulls are tested ideally prior to but certainly after purchase prior before use. A sub fertile bull can have a devastating effect on a sucker herd's performance. Grant funding is available via HCC of £70 per farm to test bulls—use it!

HCC are also currently providing funding towards the cost of AI using selected semen and easy calving bulls which is well worth you taking a look at especially with regard to breeding heifer replacements for the suckler herd.

Coccidiosis is caused by a protozoan parasite which is being seen increasingly on suckler calf units. The lifecycle of this pathogen is very short enabling huge potential for quick spread and build up of infection. An infected calf can shed millions of infective oocysts per day. Intensification and housing where there is a warm, moist, environment is perfect for rapid reproduction of the parasite. Most cattle sheds will have some level of coccidia present - it is virtually impossible to keep the environment completely free.

Disease is most often seen in calves within a stated "risk period" of 3 weeks – 4 months old, however it is not unusual to see infections in animals outside this age bracket. Whether or not animals become infected is related to the balance of pathogen load and calf immunity. Natural immunity can only come from environmental exposure— it cannot be passed on from the dam. Infection and clinical disease are seen in situations in which there is an overbearing level of oocyte burden in the environment made worse by poor hygiene and intercurrent disease. Coccidiosis is less commonly seen in adult cattle as they have been exposed to a low level of the parasite at a young age and have consequently developed adequate immunity.

### **How is it spread?**

Coccidiosis is spread by the faecal-oral route. Oocysts shed in faeces are inadvertently ingested by in-contact calves and then these multiply rapidly, causing damage within the intestines of those calves, and so on.

### **Are my calves affected?**

Common signs of infection include:

- ☒ Scouring: may look watery and contain mucus/blood
- ☒ Straining hunched calves
- ☒ Loss of appetite and dull coats
- ☒ Reduced growth/weight loss
- ☒ Secondary infections

### **Diagnosis**

There are a number of diagnostic tools we use in practice in calf scour outbreaks- some of these are on farm with immediate results, others require laboratory confirmation which can take several days- with coccidiosis the problem is that calves may already be infected but not yet showing the signs of the disease. Whilst there are drugs available for treatment of clinical cases, by then the damage has already been done. The cost of reduced growth rate and poorer performance in the future are significant not just for those affected clinically but also for the other calves in the group which will be affected sub-clinically.

### **Prevention and control**

- ☒ Minimise stress on the calves with optimum ventilation, nutrition, temperature, minimise draughts and heavy stocking rates.
- ☒ Maximise Hygiene. The best way to try and reduce the environment contamination with oocysts is to keep the calf environment clean, provide calves with a clean dry lying up area in the shed and avoid contamination of food and water sources with faeces.
- ☒ Medication. In-feed coccidiostat (usually fed for a month), or oral drench of coccidiocide to affected and incontact calves, on known affected units this can be timed to be administered before the expected clinical cases occur.

## **SHEEP NEWS**

Fluke has been a persistent problem on a number of units as we highlighted in the autumn newsletter. Clients will need to dose sheep again this January with a flukicide with activity against mature fluke and again in the spring (late April/May) with a flukicide active against adult fluke to reduce pasture contamination later in the season. Sheep should be monitored in the intervening period and suspicious deaths investigated.

There are a large number of flukicide and wormers on the market, often the names are very similar and confusing. **ALWAYS CHECK THE NAME OF THE DRUG THEY CONTAIN AND READ THE LABEL CAREFULLY.** Get impartial advice from us on what wormers / flukicides you need - we have no allegiance to any company/product and will tell you the best product for the job -not the one that gives us the best deal!!

We are now entering a critical period for ewes in the winter feeding period , 70% of the lambs growth occurs in the last 8 weeks of pregnancy , udder development begins and colostrum is produced .The rapidly expanding uterus creates significant competition for space in the abdomen - leaving less room for the rumen.

Remember that lamb mortality is highest in low birth weight lambs and/or born to ewes in poor condition. Ewes need to be fit at lambing and poorer ewes will need preferential treatment. Ewes carrying twins will require twice maintenance levels of feeding by full term. Remember also to ensure that ewes have a supply of vitamins and minerals as body reserves are limited.

Feed provided must have the following characteristics:

- Fibre high in dry matter >30%
- Total diet high digestibility >60%
- Concentrates high in energy density -13mj/kgDM
- high in crude protein >16%

While good hay or silage are capable of supplying these requirements , anything inferior will not . Intake will be adversely affected if roughage is too course and fibre length too long.

This high nutritional demand in late pregnancy continues into lactation - a 5 kilo lamb will take in 1 litre of milk a day- prolific ewes may need a diet of 18 % crude protein. A ewe with twins may have three times the maintenance requirements of the dry animal.

Many low priced concentrates are available - beware of anything with a very low price and an ash content of 10% or over- such feeds always prove false economy in the long run.

We are able to run metabolic profiles on pregnant ewes to help determine their nutritional status and plan their feed program.

MSD VET is running their barren ewe program again this winter until March 2012. Any client with scanning figures showing 3% plus empty ewes should take advantage of this subsidised blood testing service to check for evidence of Toxoplasmosis and Enzootic abortion - more details are available from the practice. As we move in to the main lambing period sheep abortion will be a major concern on a number of units, last year following an exceptionally prolonged cold period we had problems with ewes slipping lambs early just down to metabolic stress.

Aborting ewes should be marked and isolated from healthy ewes as they may remain infectious with some diseases for up to 2 weeks after the abortion has taken place , cleanses safely disposed of and foster lambs put on to aborted ewes should never be kept back as replacements. If your abortion rate is rising over 3% this needs investigating to protect future flock production(subsidised testing available).

Please ensure that all ewes receive their booster vaccination against clostridial diseases according to the manufacturer's instructions ie 4-6 weeks prior to lambing.

Contact us at the surgery for all your lambing needs and ask about our new twin lamb treatment instock.

Best wishes for the coming Spring from all the farm team at Afon vets