



LATE WINTER NEWSLETTER 2012

Happy new year to all our clients – 2012 has certainly been challenging on the weather front and we are seeing the effects on our stock production levels in the sheep and beef sector- At least now the days will begin to lengthen and the grass may start to grow! 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. The calf store trade has been strong although back on the dizzy heights of 2011 (another reason to maximise your weight of calf weaned per cow mated!) and the lamb price had a good autumn though dropped right back by december. Cull cow and ewe prices have remained good through the autumn. Despite all this the latest figures from incomes on Welsh farms from Aberystwyth University showed that the majority of farms barely covered their costs so the need to drive production efficiency is essential given the spiralling costs of feed fuel and fertiliser.

Schmallenberg infection was widespread in 2012 across Wales included in our area- an information leaflet on the disease is included.

Cattle news

Mature cows have managed fairly well but are on average 50 kilos bodyweight back on previous years. First and second calvers though have struggled to get back in calf.

- **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!- if you are handling cows – cut tails to minimise dung contamination on teats
- Taking bulls out of autumn calvers at end of January will mean calving ends mid November
- Scour problems in previous years?- vaccination against rotavirus needs completing 12-3 weeks prior to calving

- Early born autumn calves should be eating approaching 2kg per head/day of 14%CP creep per day –this is the optimum intake if calves are going on to grass with their mothers later

January is often the time we see pneumonia outbreaks in housed autumn born calves. Remember that we have access to a subsidised blood testing scheme to investigate calf pneumonia outbreaks on your farm as well as all the latest treatment and control options. As stock keepers you need to target the risk areas:

- Mixing calves from different sources/ages in same air space
- Timing of Routine procedures worming/castrating/dehorning
- Housing ensure a clean ,dry bed , good ventilation without chilling or draughts
- good hygiene practice is critical to limit the spread of contagious disease
- Ensure buildings maintained no leaking troughs or gutters esp in weather at moment
- **Identify sick calves, isolate, treat early and follow a treatment plan.**
- When outbreak occurs if possible reduce stock density to reduce pathogen load

Low blood antibodies due to poor colostrum supply with over 9% of calf losses up to 1 month old and linked with 17% further losses due to E coli and navel ill. Calves need 10% of their bodyweight in colostrum in the first 6 hours of life

Johnes disease continues to cause concern across the dairy and beef sector- newborn calves can absorb the johns bacteria across the gut lining- disinfected calving pens between each cow are the ideal but impossible in compact calving herds - erect a temp calf creep using electric fence suspended from roof - you can then keep this area really clean as maximum protection from infected dung – cows will tend to lie or stand head facing the creep- dunging away from the calves. If you have johns positive test cows calve these separately from other cows.

SHEEP NEWS

Fluke has been a persistent problem on a number of units as we highlighted in the autumn newsletter. Control has been difficult due to the high level of infection following consecutive wet summers. **Clients will need to dose sheep again this January with a flukicide with activity against maturing fluke** and again in the spring (late April/May) with a flukicide active against adult fluke to reduce pasture contamination later in the season.

Poor response to fluke treatment can be due to a number of reasons;

- Under dosing
- Incorrect storage/mixing with other products/dose not over back of tongue with oral preps
- Wrong product- not all flukicides kill all stages
- Re-infection after dosing is rapid in current conditions
- Dosing intervals too long
- Severe liver damage- stops triclabendazole (tbz) from working effectively
- **Resistance-Carry out testing in the first half of 2013 to check for TBZ resistance on your flock-protocol available from the surgery.**

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.**

Variable ewe condition score and low quality/low intake silage mean you may need to modify your sheep feeding and keep a closer eye on sheep condition score. It is still not too late to get

your silage analysed. Ewes in good condition on reasonable silage will not require supplements until about 6 weeks before lambing but this is also dependant on the number of lambs they are carrying.

Given poor silage making conditions and reduced ewe condition in 2012 it is unlikely forage feeding alone will give your ewes the energy or protein they need in the last 6 weeks of pregnancy .

What to supplement with? If you need supplementary feeding it is best to use sources of high digestible fibre like sugar beet pulp rather than cereals alone as sheep can over eat starch (high in cereals) with a reduction in forage intake and its digestibility at levels > 0.5 kilo/head/day. Proprietary compound feeds also tend to have lower starch content than cereals.

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. Use your scanning data to plan the feeding. 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%

Manage the use of body reserves to ensure ewes lamb down in march in good enough condition. Immediately after scanning separate off thin twin bearing ewes for extra feeding - try to maintain or improve condition by half a score between scanning and last 3 weeks of pregnancy.

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 in the run up to lambing to determine their energy and protein status- so better nutrition can be planned.

Feeding bales - consider splitting bales between 2 feeders and make sure it is cleared up in 3 days to reduce risk of listeria, wet weather means more silage wastage- to improve palatability put molasses on top or supplement with sugar beet pulp pellets 1/3 kilo per head.

MSD VET is running their barren ewe program again this winter until March 2013. 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).

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

From all the farm team at Afon vets- A happy and healthy 2013

