



SPRING NEWSLETTER 2012

At last the clocks have moved and the spring weather has propelled us out of the winter, temperatures in the last week have been well above average for the time of year, a bit too warm in fact although a return to more seasonal weather is now with us but it has been nice to feel the sun on our backs after what seems a long wet winter in South Wales!

WE will now be producing in conjunction with NADIS a monthly parasite bulletin for our farm clients which will go out in the bill run. This will give general advice on what to watch out for in terms of parasite control. We advise all stock clients should be taking note and using the SCOPS guidelines on good parasite control (for more info visit www.scops.org.uk). The development of anthelmintic resistance is inevitable in the future and it is vital that you all put the right steps in place to slow resistance from developing on your farm. Once resistant worms are present on a farm they will never leave - there already farms in the UK where the keeping of sheep has had to be abandoned due to the development of anthelmintic resistance!

COCCIDIOSIS-feature

Coccidiosis is a problem of intensively-reared lambs, occurring primarily indoors where stocking densities are high but may also occur in lambs at pasture, where there is heavy contamination around feed troughs in creep areas during warm wet weather. Loss of gut absorptive capacity results in profuse diarrhoea. Morbidity is high but mortality, even in severe cases, is low. Convalescence is protracted in all cases resulting in lengthy delays to finishing and extra feeding costs.

Group problem of scouring lambs

The major differential diagnosis for scouring lambs grazing contaminated pasture is nematodiosis (*Nematodirus battus* infestation), which typically affects young lambs during April/May. (Contaminated pasture relates to grassland grazed by lambs during the previous spring)

Clinical presentation

In lambs, infection is initially picked up from the ewes and then, following the short life cycle in the lambs, builds up rapidly in the environment. Lambs four to six week-old are most commonly affected. The common presenting signs are a rapid loss of weight and foetid diarrhoea containing mucus and flecks of blood, causing staining of the perineum and tail. Straining, with partial eversion of the rectum, is often accompanied by painful vocalisation. Clinical disease can be precipitated/exacerbated by a stressful event such as adverse weather, weaning or sudden dietary change.

Diagnosis

Veterinary diagnosis of coccidiosis is based upon clinical findings plus the demonstration of large numbers of oocysts in faecal samples (often greater than 100,000 oocysts per gram) in which *E. crandallis* or *E. ovinoidalis* predominate. In severe infestations, disease may occur before oocysts are shed in faeces. Examination of gut sections from dead lambs reveals large numbers of oocysts.

Management/Prevention/Control measures

Control involves avoidance of faecal contamination of bedding/pasture around feed troughs. Ensure clean bedding especially around feed areas, move feed hoppers regularly.

Creep areas at pasture can become heavily contaminated especially during wet weather therefore the troughs must be moved daily.

Medication of the ewe ration with decoquinate will suppress but not totally eliminate oocyst production therefore this regimen is operated in conjunction with medication of the lamb creep feed. Occasionally, disease may occur because there is a problem of ration palatability when the farmer elects to medicate only the lamb ration and the lambs choose to eat the non-medicated ewe concentrate.

Clinical coccidiosis may also occur in growing lambs, once decoquinate-medicated feed is withdrawn because active immunity is induced by contact with developing stages in the gut. In this situation, **lambs should be moved to clean pasture once the in-feed medication has been discontinued.**

Diclazuril and toltrazuril can be used for the prophylaxis and treatment of coccidiosis in lambs. With respect to prophylaxis, the whole group is drenched as soon as clinical signs are suspected in a single lamb(s). Treated lambs should then be moved to a **clean area** to prevent re-infection before they have time to develop protective immunity.

In situations where lambs are moved onto suspected heavily-contaminated fields, diclazuril or toltrazuril should be given 10 to 14 days later to enable some active immunity to develop during this intervening period.

Future control recommendations could include:

- ☐ Adjust the time of treatment of the flock according to the management practices (indoor management, outdoor management, pasturing, etc.), and the history of onset of diarrhoea in previous years.
- ☐ Treatment should be given as soon as clinical signs of coccidiosis appear in several lambs.
- ☐ When treatment is withheld until most lambs are exhibiting clinical signs, recovery of the damage already inflicted to the intestine affects the production parameters for several months.
- ☐ It is advisable to establish disease prevention programmes in the veterinary flock health plan to avoid the detrimental effects of coccidiosis.

BULL SEMEN TESTING

Increasing numbers of bulls are now being semen tested at least 6 to 8 weeks prior to being put to service. A few years ago 386 beef bulls were examined in south east Scotland with a failure rate of 33% made up from :

☐☐ Poor quality semen alone 12%

☐☐ Clinical defect 21% - from a visual inspection of legs/feet/back and examination of the Testicle, penis etc. This gives assurance that when they were examined they had the semen quality required and were fit for purpose but does not give an indication of libido.

Testing early allows time to purchase a replacement if necessary before the bulling period. If not wanting to purchase at a sale then private purchases can be undertaken before the choice of bulls becomes limited.

What about Sub Fertile Bulls?

Those sub-fertile bulls can also be tested again prior to mating to look for improvements in semen. However prior to the retest you are often then left with a dilemma whether to purchase another or wait to the result of the retest. Maybe you have enough bull power anyway if other bulls have passed with flying colours. If not, it is best to have a bull either purchased or at least ready to be bought if the bull fails a retest. Often they are retested very close to the bulling period. Veterinary advice should be sought at all times. Increasingly therefore the advice is to cull such bulls as soon as possible unless there is any suggestion that they might recover following a short period of rest. A good policy is to have newly purchased young bulls semen tested.

Bull Power

After the bulls have gone out, problems often occur such as lameness which requires another bull to be used. But time after time many farmers fail to have back up and desperately get on the phone looking for another bull to purchase or hire. Most pedigree herd have sold their best and have very few left in months such as June. To hire a bull which have been used on other farms is a health risk and cannot be advised! Too often what is purchased or hired in is a bull that most will say "It will have to do". Plan B – back up always needs to be in place before the season not during.

Ratio of Cows to a Bull

When the question is asked "How many cows to each bull, the overwhelming answer will be that it should be about 30 to 35 cows to a bull. This still remains true but one of the main reasons this figure came about was simply down to average grass field sizes that existed. Young bulls will often have a guide figure of about 15 to the bull. With the addition of bull and semen testing advice has advanced to about 50 to 55 cows to a bull which has successfully passed the bull and semen test but it has to be argued if this is a good move or not. Many would agree this could be done but not until after the first 3 weeks that the bulls have been out as 65% should be in calf anyway. It will take time to get many to have the confidence to run at this high ratio.

Breeding period

Having the bull in for 9 week realistically gives the majority of cows 3 turns to the bull. Some extend to 10 weeks to cover those cows that return to heat over 21 days. Cows can vary cycling from 18 to 24 days.

BULL PROMOTION OFFER FOR APRIL/ MAY / JUNE 2012- MOT YOUR STOCK BULL

Open to Afon vet farm practice clients only

Bull clinical exam and assessment, fertility test up to BCVA national std

Total cost £85 plus vat per bull including visit, of which £50 is reclaimable per bull tested up to a maximum of £200 per farm in 2012 from HCC

(additional cost will be incurred for blood sampling/tests and sheath washing where necessary)

Afon vets - Wales most experienced bull testing team.

With the cold nights still with us watch out for hypothermia in turned out lambs - previous newsletters carried details on how to treat these lambs but for an update please call us at the surgery.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter and find the new monthly parasite forecast useful. Please contact the surgery and speak to one of the farm team for advice