SHROPSHIRE FARM VETS
stand out from the herd

SHROPSHIRE FARM NEWS

IN THIS ISSUE: MAY 2024

Welcome

"Are we nearly there yet?!"

One can still count on one hand how many warm and sunny days we have had this year, with almost nobody having been able to take a first cut of silage. A couple of days of sun (and some wind to dry the boggy wet patches) and everyone should soon be away. After such a prolonged wet period, there will undoubtedly be the risk of low mag uptake - which Mihail covers later – but also a range of other challenges;

Other than magnesium, the leaching out of other macro and micro minerals is a string possibility this season. If you are cutting silage, it is worth paying the extra for full mineral analysis this year, and ensure there is appropriate supplementation in the ration. For those grazing, you can get grass samples analysed, and supplementing for magnesium and calcium is advisable. It is also sensible to blood sample grazing animals early this season to pre-empt any deficiencies. Many can be remedied with in-water supplementation, or bolus.

Liver fluke is likely to be another spanner in the works this season, after a long period where the water snail – the intermediate host for fluke – has had excellent breeding conditions. Early signs of fluke include weight loss, scour, swelling under the jaw/brisket and milk drop. We can use the Ovacyte machine at the office to test for fluke eggs, once animals have been at grass for 12 weeks, and before this by testing blood, milk or dung at external labs for antibodies/antigens. There are a range of flukicides available, and picking the right one for your farm and situation is important – so give us a call and one of the vets can give you the right advice. As the season progresses, we can test for fluke and worm eggs, to establish not only "if" you need to worm, but "with what".

Clostridial diseases, such as tetanus, blackleg, pulpy kidney, etc are common at this time of year. With the conditions of warm, wet weather, there is increased chance of survival and re-activation of clostridial spores. Whilst we traditionally think of this as a problem in grazing animals, we have seen cases in housed cattle, where soil contamination of forages has been unavoidable. We saw several cases of an emerging condition, called "jejunal haemorrhagic syndrome" in housed dairy cows last year. This is thought to be caused by clostridia, and typically presents with a cow either passing dark/tarry digested blood or passing nothing at all, looking very sick and off feed

and milk. Whilst the prognosis is poor for these cases, (surgery, penicillin and drenching with liquid paraffin together all boost survival rates from zero to around 30%) making a diagnosis and adjusting management is important.

On a more positive note (!) as grant applications are being made, ensure you use the free "Animal Health and Welfare Pathways" health planning visits to provide evidence to support your applications for capital grants. Just call the office for more information.

With the mating period about to start in spring herds, make sure you have tested your bulls – both the stock bulls as usual, and the ones in the AI flask. We have the dyneval machine on hand to stress test batches of semen before it is used in earnest.

James

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Hypomagnesemia in Cattle: Understanding the Risk of Grass Tetany

As lush green pastures emerge with the onset of spring, cattle are often exposed to a hidden danger: hypomagnesemia, commonly known as grass tetany or staggers. This condition poses a significant risk to cattle health and productivity, making it crucial for farmers to understand its causes, symptoms, and prevention strategies.

Hypomagnesemia is a metabolic disorder characterized by low levels of magnesium in the blood. Magnesium is an essential mineral involved in various physiological processes, including muscle function and nerve transmission. Inadequate magnesium intake or absorption can lead to a deficiency, resulting in neurological symptoms known as tetany. There is little to no storage of magnesium in the body, so daily intakes must match daily requirements in order to avoid a deficiency.

Several factors contribute to the development of hypomagnesemia in cattle, with lush spring grass being a primary culprit. Rapidly growing, lush pastures often contain high levels of potassium and nitrogen, which can interfere with magnesium absorption and also fast-growing grass is low in magnesium as well as being low in fibre, so it passes quickly through the gut, reducing the time for the absorption of nutrients and increasing the risk for animals to develop grass staggers.

Additionally, low magnesium levels in the soil or inadequate dietary magnesium intake can further exacerbate the risk.

The onset of hypomagnesemia can be sudden and severe, with affected cattle exhibiting symptoms such as:

- **Muscle tremors or twitching**
- **Staggering gait or lack of coordination**
- **Head pressing or circling**
- **Agitation or nervousness**
- **Sudden death (in severe cases)**

Early detection of symptoms is crucial for prompt intervention, as untreated hypomagnesemia can quickly escalate and lead to significant health complications or death.

Preventing hypomagnesemia in cattle requires proactive management practices, especially during periods of lush grass growth. Key prevention strategies include:

1. **Supplemental Feeding:** Providing cattle with access to magnesium supplements, either through mineral blocks, loose minerals, in-water magnesium flakes or feed additives, can help ensure adequate magnesium intake, especially when grazing on lush pastures.

2. **Forage Testing:** Regularly testing forage samples can help farmers identify mineral imbalances and adjust feeding practices accordingly. Ensuring a balanced mineral profile in the diet is essential for preventing deficiencies.

3. **Grazing Management:** Implementing rotational grazing practices and limiting access to high-risk pastures during periods of rapid grass growth can help reduce the risk of hypomagnesemia. Grazing cattle on mature grass or supplementing with hay can also mitigate the risk of magnesium deficiency.

4. **Water Quality:** Ensuring access to clean, fresh water is essential for maintaining hydration and supporting proper mineral absorption. Water sources with high levels of sulphate or other minerals that interfere with magnesium absorption should be avoided.

5. **Veterinary Monitoring:** Regular veterinary health checks can help identify and address potential risk factors for hypomagnesemia. Veterinarians can provide valuable guidance on preventive measures and treatment options tailored to specific herd management practices.

As we all eagerly welcome the arrival of spring and embrace the warmth of the sun, it's crucial to remain vigilant against the threat of hypomagnesemia. By understanding the risk factors, recognizing the symptoms, and implementing proactive prevention strategies, farmers can safeguard the health and well-being of their cattle and ensure optimal productivity throughout the grazing season. With careful management and attention to detail, the risk of grass tetany can be minimized, allowing cattle to thrive on the lush pastures of spring.

Mihail

Cocci and Nematodirus – know the difference!

Lambs in Shropshire have been at high risk of nematodirus for a number of weeks now, and we have certainly seen evidence of nematodirus in the faecal egg counts we have carried out so far this year. However, coccidiosis affects lambs at the same age and has similar symptoms, so it's important to know the difference because the treatments are (obviously) different!

Nematodirus – the lamb killer

Nematodirus eggs on the ground hatch in the spring, leading to new season lambs being exposed to a sudden rush of infectious worm larvae. Lambs are most at risk between 6 and 12 weeks old, with the main symptoms being a severe and profuse scour, potentially culminating in death when infections are heavy and lambs are left untreated. Faecal egg counts are a late indicator that this worm is present, as it is the immature non-egg laying larvae that cause the disease. However, faecal egg counts can be used in such cases to distinguish this disease from coccidiosis or mixed infection with other worms. On most farms, all wormers are still effective against this worm. A treatment decision should be made based on the both the age of your lambs, and the current level of risk in your area (check the parasite forecast for this).

Coccidiosis – the productivity killer

Coccidiosis is a parasite, but not a worm. It is very unusual for lambs to die of coccidiosis, unlike in calves where it can be a killer in severe cases. The coccidia species that affect lambs are different than those that infect calves, and lambs and calves cannot cross-infect each other.

Coccidiosis in lambs generally acts to drag down daily live weight gains and kill productivity. The high risk age for lambs to suffer from this parasite is 6 to 12 weeks, just as with nematodirus. However, as with nematodirus, coccisiodis can be differentiated under the microscope so that the correct treatment can be given. Again, the main symptom of this disease is scouring, although generally not as severe as that seen with nematodirus. As a truly 'subclinical' disease, if you see a handful of lambs that are scouring due to coccidiosis, there will be many others below the surface that appear normal, but are actually suffering a reduced growth rate due to the parasite.

If your lambs are scouring it's important to differentiate these two parasites before making a treatment decision, and we can help you do that. Get on the phone to your vet for advice on the next steps to take if you find you lambs in this position this spring.

John

COMPUTER SYSTEM UPDATE

On 1st May we are changing our practice management system. This is the computer programme that runs pretty much everything for us including client details, stock control and of course invoicing. Whilst there will be virtually no discernible change from a client perspective, the end-of-month invoices will have a slightly different style, but one which should be very straight forwards to work through.

If there are any queries or concerns, please contact Alistair

TB UPDATE

This month we tested 12,679 cattle over 55 tests. There were 7 reactors and 30 inconclusive reactors.

EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS

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Please keep a note of the mobile numbers for the vets should you ever need them

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