LIVER FLUKE AND THIN EWES

As we all know the challenge of liver fluke this season has been unprecedented following the severe wet weather and I am sure many of you will have ewes that have lambed/ are approaching lambing in less than ideal body condition as a consequence. According to figures from AVMA there was a 10-fold increase in acute liver fluke cases in sheep in the last quarter of 2012 compared to the same period in 2011.

The main signs of fluke infestation at this time of year will be animals in very poor body condition with poor fleece quality and in some cases there may be brittle jaw. Such sheep will likely die when compounded with the metabolic pressures of lambing.

When it comes to treatment ensure that you are using a product that is appropriate for the time of year ie Triclabendazole is the only flukicide with activity against immature fluke. Remember that flukicides have no persistency and only kill fluke in the animal at the time when it is treated. As soon as an animal returns to graze contaminated pasture it will become re-infected. This means that you will have to treat more frequently than you think. Don’t get confused with combination products infected. This means that you will have to treat more frequently than you think. Don’t get confused with combination products.

THE ANNUAL “WHOSE COWS ARE OUT FIRST?” CONTEST IS NOW UPON US!

Many spring calving herds will now be in the thick of calving and anxiously peering out of the window each morning praying that there is no rain! There are two leaves out on the grass on many pastures now, so for some, turn-out may only be days away! It is worth focusing on what should be done in the coming weeks in order to maximise in-calf rates and management schedules for your farm. There is a leaflet SCOPS for further details. During the mating season, the pre-breeding session can be a valuable tool to improve submission and in-calf rate by the end of the mating season.

We have had our winter will we get a spring? I think everyone is praying now for a bit of fine weather and sun this month, to get the grass growing, the land dried, and most importantly, make us all feel a bit better. It seems to have been a very long winter and we certainly have seen a lot of grumbling health issues in animals that have been out, but we have also seen a small number of unusual outbreaks of pneumonia in housed adult cattle. As well as the vagaries of the weather we also have had Schmallenberg and high levels of fluke added into the mix. We will continue to roll out our free fluke testing this month – see inside- and we would encourage you if you have had any suspicious cases of Schmallenberg to report them to the practice even if you don’t need a visit. Please also remember that we had fluke, sheep abortion and watery mouth long before we had Schmallenberg, so please don’t just put all your problems down to Schmallenberg when you may have another disease that we can do something about.

We also have a brief article on ensuring that your calves get the best start in life. This is often the month of highest calf mortality as the numbers of calves and the challenge from bugs build up.

For our spring calving herds the calving period is well and truly underway now and James has some advice as to how to prepare your herd now for maximum fertility later on. He will also be presenting the findings of his DBR report to the Shropshire Grassland society as some of his findings are very relevant and practically important as to how you manage your spring calving herd.

Tim
PAIN RELIEF

Every so often, we want to challenge the way you may think about some subjects – pain management. In recent years there have been major advances in our understanding of pain in farm animals which has led to changes in the way we approach painful conditions and procedures. I hope that the days of not even considering pain management are over.

Pain in farm animals has been shown to adversely affect normal behaviour such as lying and feeding, reduce weight gain, increase stress and ultimately reduce animal welfare. Many of you will have seen use more and more anti-inflamatory products at calvings, operations, mastitis, lame-ness, etc and the benefits are well documented, especially when used at the time, not just when there is a problem. In fact, so good are the benefits, some farmers have felt it beneficial to give anti-inflammatories to every cow/heifer that calves.

Over the last few months, we have been using pain relief in more routine procedures such as castration and dehorning, again with obvious beneficial effects. Research has shown that the pain associated with dehorning lasts up to 44 hours - and this is where the long acting NSAID, Metacam should be used. One of the greatest benefits is a higher weight gain in the following 10 days post dehorning which more than covers the cost of the product.

Since largely it is yourselves who will be dealing with an animal at the time of a painful procedure, it is you who have the best opportunity to intervene with pain relief at that time, not three days later.………..

MEDS REQUESTS

We try and provide a professional and efficient service no matter what time of day or night. However calls are increasing over a weekend to supply meds which are not of an urgent nature. We endeavour to accommodate all requests but would politely ask you to organise your meds orders when the practice is open, Mon –Fri 8.15am-5.30pm. We will be looking into this in more detail in the next newsletter.

BACK TO BASICS

Colostrum: Above all else, colostrum is the most important aspect of calf management. We will make no apology for repeating 6 pints within 6 hours of birth. The benefits of good colostrum intake are well known however failure to take in a sufficient amount of good quality colostrum is major risk factor which can lead to death and disease in young calves. It is also not good enough to be told that the calf has sucked - 32% of dairy calves failed to suck their mother within 6 hours of birth and 61% of calves left to suck their mother failed to take in adequate amounts of colostrum.

Freezing good quality colostrum in 6 pint amounts is a good idea and can be stored frozen for up to a year with no loss of quality. Frozen colostrum should be thawed slowly in warm water to prevent it being damaged – NOT microwaved. Please note if you are trying to control or eradicate Johnes disease from your herd then there is the potential to spread infection by feeding pooled colostrum.

Two further points, the protective effect of colostrum can be further improved by vaccinating the cow in late pregnancy using one of the vaccines against rotavirus, coronavirus and E coli K99 such as Rotavec-corona and remember higher yielding cows, heifers and any cow which has been pre-milked or suffered milk leakage will have poorer quality.

A major source of pathogens for the calf is its mother. Once the colostrum has been fed removing the calf from the mother to an individual pen will reduce the risk of disease. It is a good idea to continue feeding colostrum for the first week of life to “line” the gut with antibodies – these will not get absorbed but definitely help with calf scours problems.

Feeding: a calf needs approx. 18MJ energy daily to grow quickly. Check your feeding rate with the level of milk powder, if used. Also, a calf’s energy requirements increase by approx. 2.5% with every degree of temperature change from 15 degrees so please feed accordingly.

Hygiene: An often overlooked but essential element in the good management of calves, so clean buckets, utensils etc please.

Ventilation: Good ventilation (not a draft) keeps the calf’s environment dry and reduces the spread of bugs. A simple smoke test will prove if ventilation is sufficient - smoke needs to disappear in one minute. Remember to keep the gaps open/closed as and when the temperature rises/drops.

Bedding: Most diarrhoea causing bugs spread via the faeces. Dry & clean bedding reduces the contact and spread. Poor ventilation often translates into wet bedding. Follow the all in, all out principle and clean and disinfect between batches.

No mixing: Keep different ages separated. 3 month old calves are stronger than 3 week old ones. Older calves can fight off and carry bugs without showing signs while spreading disease to the younger ones.

PSPB - A NEW MILK PREGNANCY TEST

In the last 6 months a new milk pregnancy test has been available to farmers in the USA, and it appears likely that it will be coming our way soon. The idea of this test is technology for pregnancy testing for use on dairy farms since the advent of ultrasound scanning and is obviously something that is going to be in the news in the not too distant future.

We will be looking into this in more detail in the next newsletter.

FLUKE TREATMENT CHANGES

If you are a beef or sheep farmer, you can probably ignore this section, but be warned that this is the way medicines are going in the future – more and more regulation and less and less freedom to make informed decisions/choices. For info, this is an EU-wide policy, not just the UK.

If you are a milk producer, read on……

You will be very aware that increased levels of fluke have been around over the last few months and hopefully we have sampled your bulk tank sometime in the last few weeks to get a current picture on your farm. With this in mind, the VMD (Veterinary Medicines Directorate) has announced an EU-wide restriction in what products can be used in milking cattle (milking cows, dry cows and even some classes of heifers). This is down to increased residues being found in milk, especially from some of the larger black calving herds in some countries that are over the sea and west of here.

The advice confirms that many products which we have used at drying off are now not authorised for use in animals producing milk for human consumption, including during the dry period, and in addition for heifers, see below,

Products containing closulan (eg homec Super injection), do not use in the last third of first pregnancy

Products containing closantel (eg Supaverm, Flukiver), do not use in the second half of first pregnancy

Products containing nitroxynil (eg Trodax), do not use in the last third of pregnancy

Products containing triclabendazole (eg Fasinex, Tribex, Combines), do not use in the last third of pregnancy

Products containing triclabendazole (eg Cydecin Triclomac), do not use at any time.

The above are for dairy heifers intended to produce milk for human consumption, there are further restrictions for milking sheep, but I am not aware of any within the practice.

Many products already have existing restrictions in their use, all of the above are now in addition. The manufacturers have been given six months to alter their labelling. What hasn’t been said, but is almost certain, is that the dairies will increasingly be on the lookout for such products when routine sampling for antibiotics.

So any good news? We are still allowed to use products that contain oxyclozanide (eg Duvostome) and albendazole (eg Albex), but both these products only kill adult stage fluke, and in the case of albendazole, probably not that well either. Duvostome is an imported product, so in the light of the above, we do not yet know whether we will be allowed to continue importing.

As to the future of fluke control? Much more will have to be made of fencing off wet areas, more snail killing and probably increased frequency of dosing with adults only products. Watch this space!