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Science • Commitment • Results
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3. Northpoint Dunmow, Essex
4. Westpoint Midhurst, West Sussex
5. Westpoint Winchester, Hampshire
6. Westpoint Southwest Trethorne, Cornwall
7. Northpoint RVC Hatfield, Hertfordshire
8. Westpoint Southwest Okehampton, Devon
9. Westpoint Southwest Winnard’s Perch, Cornwall
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What can we expect for the future of the UK’s Livestock Industry?

Firstly, can I say how pleased I am to have joined the Westpoint team. Not only have I been made to feel very welcome, but have been very impressed by the professionalism and enthusiasm of all those I have met.

The future of the UK livestock industry will face a number of challenges over the next few years, with the increased global demand for meat and milk, the abolition of milk quotas, new EU directives and the changing approach to medicine provision to name but a few. However change brings opportunity and it is clear that Westpoint is preparing to meet the challenges and continue to be a winner in the evolving market place. To be clear this will only happen if we invest in both the company business plans and the teams that deliver in all areas of our business.

Whether it is a calving cow in the middle of the night, a breeding soundness examination of your bull, or a flock health plan to reduce wormer resistance, we can help provide the best in veterinary care.

As the new Chairman, I can see the dedication our team of vets have to the livestock under their care and this will be the focus of our business in the future. Meeting the demands of a changing farming industry, will always be underpinned by our dedication to traditional veterinary services whilst rising to the new challenges of the future.

Whether the challenge is to meet the demands of bovine TB, to assisting in the development of new products and procedures with a research department that is gathering an international reputation or the continued development of a laboratory that provides both vets and farmers with swift, accurate and cost effective clinical information; Westpoint strives to be at the forefront of farm animal health. It is our nature to utilise our strengths to support the changing face of our industry rather than quietly follow in the footsteps of others.

The main focus of Westpoint Veterinary Group is to deliver the highest standards of farm animal veterinary practice while developing new services that help you address the changing face of UK agriculture.

In January of this year, Westpoint received an investment from August Equity, a company that strongly believes in what we were aiming to achieve. The investment gives us the opportunity to support our team and continue to grow the services we offer to our clients.

It is my pleasure to introduce you to this latest edition of Viewpoint. In my opinion, not only does it provide a large variety of information and articles on areas from mycotoxins in dairy cattle to mastitis in alpacas, but it also takes time to focus on developments within our industry, our environment and our community.

This edition of Viewpoint mirrors our determination to focus on services and relationships with our farmers, whilst working in the background to plot a path that best serves our clients and industry. I would like to invite you take whatever time you can spare to put the kettle on, kick off your boots and enjoy the articles and reports which we have put together.

Finally, I have started my visits to the practices and would like very much to visit farms with you, when possible, to experience your service at the sharp end and to hear your views of what is good and what we need to continue to develop our successful business.

Steve Duncan
Chairman, Westpoint Veterinary Group
A number of Vets from across the group recently attended the annual BCVA congress in Harrogate. An excellent scientific program was augmented with involvement from some of the Westpoint team.

Ginny Sherwin from the Warnham practice published data correlating the impact of colostrum type on the failure of passive transfer in calves.

Data showed that poor quality colostrum is a frequent finding in the modern high yielding dairy cow and can result in failure of passive transfer and calves with a reduced immune tolerance. Calf colostrum supplements are a useful method to “top up” calves which have received colostrums of poorer quality, but are not as effective as feeding good quality cow colostrums.

Charlotte Pennington from the Cumbrian practice published data on the optimal time for A.I. using the fabdec oestrus detection system.

This was a nine month study undertaken in a high yielding Holstein herd. Data suggested the optimum time to A.I. was 12 hours after onset of increased activity, with the optimal range 4-14 hours after onset. These figures being comparable to previous published work. The highest conception rate (56%) was achieved when the cow was served at peak activity.

Charlotte and Mike Reynolds published data on the relationship between total protein measurements (adequacy of colostral transfer) in new born calves and their subsequent daily live weight gain.

Data was gathered over a twelve month period and whilst not currently statistically significant and still ongoing, data does suggest that calves with higher Total Protein levels at <7 days of age go on and grow more quickly than their counterparts which had less adequate colostral transfer.

Finally, Mike Reynolds from the Cumbrian practice published data on the fertility outcomes of 37 problem breeder cows following a therapeutic flush wash out.

This technique has been widely undertaken in the Cumbria and Dumfries practices and data suggested 65% of cows fell pregnant within two services post flush wash out. With the average days in milk at =250 days and the average service number =8 in cows featured in the study, a very promising set of results was obtained. This study is ongoing and being further developed and results are showing continued improvement.

Michael Reynolds BVM&S CertCHP MRCVS

In early December I travelled to China for a 10 day lecture tour to teach fertility and ultrasound use to farmers and vets.

This was my first visit to China, and it is quite a culture shock. China is undergoing a huge expansion in the dairy sector, with liquid milk in very high demand and achieving farmgate prices of more than double the UK.

After a quick stop in Beijing to see the sights, I travelled to Shijiazhuang and Changchun in the North East of China to visit a number of large 3000 cow dairy herds. They are very much based on the American sand lot systems, with paddocks and self-locking yolkers to enable daily heat detection and insemination. Most herds had a specific reproduction team, consisting of AI techs and reproduction vets, who between them used tail paint and synch programs to achieve pregnancy.

Their approach was slightly old fashioned, with most herds using Estrumate alone in their synch program, and heat detection rates were low. Manual pregnancy diagnosis was done at 50 days plus, and they really bought into the ultrasound idea once they used the kit and realised that Preg Checks could be performed down to 28 days. We discussed a number of ways to improve the reproductive efficiency of the unit and with a much more aggressive early identification of “not-served” cows, and using progesterone based synch programs (CIDRs or PRIDs), then their pregnancy rates should improve. Something to monitor and discuss on my next visit!

I then flew half way across the country to Bayannaer in Inner Mongolia, although unlike the name suggests, it is still in China. Here I met with a farmer who owned seventeen 3000-cow farms and was looking to build another ten next year. The vision and drive of this set up was really impressive, and the rate of expansion is mind boggling, but brings with it a real challenge with staffing of the appropriate quality and quantity. Dairy farming in this area of China is fairly new and they don’t have a ready supply of skilled workers, which requires training them up from scratch. Also in this part of the world Foot and Mouth is endemic in the wildlife and so the farm goes to extreme lengths to ensure biosecurity. All the workers live on the farm, and full protective clothing is worn by visitors, who also have to walk through a disinfection room with a footbath and UV lighting, before gaining entry to the unit.

**Dairy farming in China is certainly undergoing a huge change . . .**

. . . and China is as different from the UK as you can be, but the farmers out there are dealing with many of the same issues with heat detection and nutrition that are the same the world over.

Paul Horwood BVet Med DBR MRCVS
What’s new with Westpoint?

You may well have heard that some changes have occurred here at Westpoint Veterinary Group (WVG) . . .

. . . and, behind the scenes, that is indeed true. Meanwhile, between you and your own vet and practice, you can be assured it is business as usual.

The change involves WVG’s ownership and is designed to make more funding and expertise available to invest in developing our people, services and products...all geared towards our sole focus of supporting your farm with high quality vets and innovative veterinary services.

Indeed, any success we have had in the past and may have in the future is based on our clients’ success. There is no other way.

The new ownership structure involves an investment company called August Equity, with original Westpoint vet Matt Dobbs appointed Managing Director. Our new Chairman is Steve Duncan, who previously was Executive Chairman of the Health and Beauty division of Alliance Boots. Incoming Finance Director Paul Hawkes brings experience from a number of senior roles, most recently as FD at TUI Travel.

Amid these changes, we are delighted to retain the involvement of Westpoint founder Rob Drysdale, who now takes responsibility for leading new projects to continue strengthening our service to clients like yourself.

Indeed, all Westpoint’s previous shareholders and partners are excited about the opportunity and have re-invested in the business, all taking senior management roles to ensure seamless continuity of service and support.

August Equity itself already has experience in the veterinary sector, having invested in Independent Vetcare in 2011. As we all can see, livestock production is changing rapidly. Driven by strong underlying forces including increasing global demand for animal protein, governmental focus on food security and the need for efficient livestock productivity. Our purpose is to help you care for your livestock and meet the demands of this changing market.

Please do not hesitate to contact your local vet if you have any concerns.

Best wishes.

The Westpoint Team

Supporting your farm with high quality vets and innovative veterinary services
Managed environments - our heritage and future.

Sussex is a truly beautiful county in the Summer! Sipping Pimms on the Polo Lawns at Midhurst, watching the racers at the Goodwood Festival of Speed or eating strawberries at the tennis at Eastbourne - all indulgent (and sadly for me only aspirational) alfresco pleasures!

But spending time outside in my quiet wooded corner of the Sussex Weald in August was anything but pleasurable! The mean daily temperature averaged a pleasant 23°C with over eight hours of sunshine a day; however my outdoor lifestyle was blighted, as my garden was inundated with a plague of wasps of truly biblical proportions. Even a quick tea break outside was not possible without a deluge of wasps trying to finish off my half dunked bourbon!

The reason for this invasion is a multitude of wasp nests in ground holes in the fields surrounding our small village – to date two dozen have been destroyed. And all these wasp nests are built in holes created by another member of the local wildlife who has also seen recent explosion in numbers. While searching for a favourite meal of earthworms the ever growing local badger population has inadvertently created many holes, a great home for the black and yellow pest!

Badgers have always been part of the local ecology and TB has also been a problem in East Sussex for years. Traditionally the Sussex enclave of TB has been successfully contained, with local farmers careful about moving cattle and the geographical constraints of the English Channel and A27 preventing migration of the wildlife reservoir.

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Whether the epidemiology of bovine TB involves both cattle and badgers is now rarely questioned. But whether the exceptional rise in Bovine TB in cattle in recent years, both in the SE of England and in the rest of the UK, is mostly or only partially associated with a rise in wildlife associated disease is strongly debated - and not just in the West Country, but passionately so here in Sussex as well, the home county of the UK’s only Green party MP!

But one statement is beyond debate – that is, we have for millennia, and continue to, live in a managed natural environment.

Who can forget the words of Wordsworth and the other Lake Poets as they marvelled at the Georgian farmed Cumbrian landscape? And as I drive around Sussex on my farm calls I also view the beautiful countryside; the carefully managed woodlands that have been cropped for centuries in this, the UK’s most wooded county, and the vast expanse of the South Downs that were covered in trees until 3000 years ago, felled to make way for sheep farming. Both these environments are still carefully managed, to ensure the beauty of our farmed landscape and a productive agricultural industry. Likewise our wildlife must also be managed to maintain the natural and farmed environment – ask any Highland dweller about the effect of an overpopulation of Red Deer on the ancient Scottish woodlands.

So when the other recent and growing population in Sussex, the anti fracking protestors of Balcombe, give directions to the new Cuadrilla drilling site based on the presence of black and white road kill – “eh lad, to get past the protest make sure you take the right turn immediately after the third dead badger!” – then maybe this is one member of our managed natural environment who’s numbers have grown too high and to a point that they are having a disproportionate effect on our managed and farmed landscape.

If the only side effect of this growing badger population was the occasional extra wasp in our cup of tea, we would all put up with the inconvenience and drink indoors. However for many cattle keepers the presence of a diseased badger population is not simply an inconvenience they can continue to live with and managing our natural environment has, and continues to be, necessary to preserve livelihoods and landscapes in every county across our beautiful land.

Matthew Dobbs BVM&S Cert CHP GDL MRCVS
Research is a key part of what we do at Westpoint.

“Why does research belong in a veterinary practice?” you may ask. Well, for a number of reasons: the research we do supports the safe and sustainable supply and use of medicines, a better understanding of the problems we face as an industry, and an “evidence based” approach to the clinical work we do on-farm.

To take medicine supply, all new medicines need to be carefully tested in the real world before they can be licensed for use, and we work closely with the pharmaceutical industry to evaluate new medicines on client farms in carefully controlled studies. This work can be time-consuming for participating farmers, but has the benefit of regular farm vet visits as part of the trial, and ultimately helps the development of the new vaccines, anthelmintics and antibiotics necessary to safeguard the future health and welfare of our livestock.

We also evaluate the performance of existing licensed medicines, for example we are currently coming into the final year of a 3 year Defra funded study looking at wormer efficacy/resistance in cattle. It’s too early to draw firm conclusions on resistance, but we have already seen that many farms have historically been worming much more frequently than our research found necessary; which not only increases farm costs, but also increases the risk of resistance development. In this work we weighed all animals to calculate the correct treatment dose, and some farmers were surprised how heavy their youngstock actually were, highlighting the importance of an accurate weight before treatment (a weighband is just as effective as scales).

We develop worm egg monitoring packages that help clients make more informed and cost-effective choices.

Our research team also works with Westpoint vets and external experts to better understand key disease/welfare challenges such as how best to monitor and manage transition cows, how to control and eradicate BVDV, how to optimise your mastitis control programme and such like. Working this way we can use work conducted on a number of farms to evaluate and implement the best approaches, rather than simply doing “what we’ve always done”. It keeps us up-to-date and connected to the experts, and allows us to follow current, well tested approaches to the challenges we all face as an industry.

I suppose it’s ultimately about turning the knowledge we gain into cost-effective approaches on-farm. That’s something we can all buy in to!

Ian Nanjiani MSc MRCVS
Culling In Dairy Cows

With the introduction of new culling measures within the updated Red Tractor Assurance standards . . .

. . . we thought that it was a good opportunity to look at the way we record and analyse culling within our dairy herds and update our Health Plans to ensure we look in more depth at culling. In the past we have focused on replacement rate, by looking at the number of animals sold and the number died and potentially a few of the most common reasons. However we are keen to start taking a more thorough look at the reasons why animals leave the herd, such as at what point in lactation they go and whether you get any money back for them.

After initial discussions within the health planning group it quickly became apparent we had to standardise our culling definitions. We settled on defining a cull as, any animal which leaves the herd. This is then broken down into 3 subsections.

Voluntary culling is when animals are either sold on, or killed for meat, or for a reason not associated with disease e.g. behaviour, yield or age.

An involuntary cull is when an animal is either sold on or culled for meat for a reason associated with either disease or management, such as high cell count, poor fertility or a TB reactor.

The third category is involuntary deaths. These are animals that are either shot on farm or die and have no financial value other than a cost of disposal.

Breaking down the reasons for animals leaving the herd in this way is an effective way of trying to identify areas for improvement if culling is deemed as excessive within your unit. We have also started breaking down culling by lactation, paying particular attention to 1st and 2nd lactation animals, and also by days in milk. In the majority of systems if an animal leaves the herd in the first 2 months after calving, it normally represents a failure of transition / fresh cow management, especially if she goes for an involuntary reason.

Setting standardised targets for specific culling reasons is tricky, as every system is different and pressures on culling can vary, especially if struggling with diseases such as TB, or a herd which sells freshly calved cows. A few quick targets are:

- A single reason should not account for more than 30% of your involuntary culls
- Less than 10% of heifers that calve in should be culled during their first lactation
- The involuntary death rate should be less than 2%
- Less than 4% of animals which calve should be culled in the first 60 days

If you are not achieving these targets then it is certainly worth asking the question “why not?”

As with all herd health, the key is good data and when it comes to culling it means standardising the recording of animals which leave the herd. When a cow leaves a record should be kept of parity, days in milk and the reason for her being culled, with the reason being chosen from a predefined list.

Phil McIntosh BVM&S MRCVS

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**Culling Tree**

TOTAL HERD

- % VOLUNTARY CULLS
- % INVOLUNTARY CULLS

- % CONFORMATION
- % BEHAVIOUR
- % POOR YIELD
- % AGE
- % TRUE CULLS
- % DEATHS

- % LAMENESS
- % MASTITIS
- % POOR FERTILITY
- % TB
- % METABOLIC
- % LAMENESS

- % INJURY
- % JOHNES
- % INFECTIOUS
- % MISCELLANEOUS

- % INJURY

**Percentage of Culls Before 60 Days in Milk**

- %

**Culled During 1st Lactation**

- %

**Culled During 2nd Lactation**

- %
Mycotoxins - common, complex and challenging

Mycotoxins are complex organic molecules that are created by moulds. Their functions are not always clear, but it seems likely that they serve to enhance the mould’s own competitive advantage.

There are more than 500 types of mycotoxin and unfortunately many mycotoxins have toxic effects, which are often profound. These effects may include severe digestive upsets, swelling of joints and will contribute most meaningfully to infertility.

Of all the many moulds that exist, we are primarily interested in just a few varieties including those of the genus Penicillium, Fusarium and Aspergillus. Fusarium moulds are the main culprits that make mycotoxins on the growing plant. In contrast to this, Penicillium species make most of the moulds in stored feeds in this country.

Mycotoxins are not just present in visibly mouldy silages. We now recognise that mycotoxins are often found at toxic doses in feeds that look fine and even in compounded feeds. So, we are misleading ourselves if we think we can assess the mycotoxin risk of a feed reliably just by looking at it.

Mycotoxins have some spectacular names that are often difficult to pronounce. These include some of the Fusarium mycotoxins deoxynivalenol, fumonisin, fusaric acid, T2 toxin and zearalenone. And Penicillium moulds make toxins including patulin, penicillic acid, mycophenolic acid and PR toxin.

The list of the specific toxic effects is long. In cattle this translates into an impressively broad range of clinical signs. These effects are largely mediated through a combination of immunosuppression, gut damage, upsets to ruminal flora and hormonal influences. As a result, cattle can suffer from impaired fertility, inconsistent milk yields, swollen hocks or teats, bloody faeces, indigestion, variable dry matter intake and muscle tremors. And this is not a full list of possible problems.

This range of illness covers just about everything short of a broken leg. And this is the problem, that mycotoxicosis mimics so many other diseases and syndromes. A fine example of this are the signs of acidosis that can equally be ascribed to mycotoxicosis. Furthermore, because mycotoxins can be unevenly distributed in feeds, the signs can be seen in a single animal or an entire group.

In suspect cases, it is important to construct and examine the list of possible causes of the signs we are seeing. It is very useful to use an advanced mycotoxin testing kit e.g. Alltech’s 37+, to characterise the nature and extent of mycotoxin challenge. Furthermore, trial treatment with a good quality mycotoxin binder, such as Mycosorb A+ is a very useful tool to explore the presumptive diagnosis of mycotoxicosis.

The choice of mycotoxin binder to use is important. Clay-based binders should be avoided as they also bind too many other nutrients including trace elements. Furthermore, they are not very effective and need to be given in relatively large amounts, which has an impact on dry matter intake.

Secondly, the chosen binder should have the backing of significant amounts of academic research that demonstrates efficacy both in vivo and in field conditions. We would expect nothing less of medicines we prescribe.

So, we do have many ways to approach mycotoxin poisoning and we have access to some good quality methods to diagnose and treat mycotoxicosis effectively.

Kumar Sivam BVSc CertCHP MSc MBA MRCVS

www.westpointfarmvets.co.uk | Westpoint
Responsible Use of Medicines

The Responsible Use of Medicines (RUM) is a term which gets frequently used as a way of justifying treatment choices. At a recent responsible use meeting run by Westpoint in association with Arla-Milklink, there were over 100 attendees – RUM is obviously a term which needs a bit more attention and explaining.

It has a lot of negative connotations within the farming community for being another lot of red tape, but actually it is a good way for farmers to treat animals effectively, safeguard the efficacy of antibiotics and demonstrate responsible use. Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) is not a new concept – vets would claim they have been prescribing responsibly for a long time. But what does the term actually mean and what effect is it going to have for you as farmers and the industry as a whole? The main driver for the increase in exposure of RUMA has been the public and political perception of antimicrobial resistance spreading from farmed animals to people. RUMA goes further than that – the main effect on farmers of using medicines responsibly is in fact improved animal health, welfare, performance and economics.

RUMA is put most succinctly as ‘As little as possible, as much as necessary’. In other words, medicines are not only used when needed, but are used properly – the correct amount given for the correct duration by the correct route for the right diagnosis. “What farmer would use antibiotics when they aren’t needed?” I hear you say. Think about policies of blanket antibiotic dry cow therapy. There is good evidence that using an internal teat seal alone performs as well as using a teat seal and an antibiotic dry cow tube when there is no infection present initially, assuming both are infused steriley.

Any decision regarding medicine use should always be in consultation with your vet. When looking at medicine treatments, all too frequently farmers give inappropriate doses for the weight of the animal, or administer medicines by the wrong route, or treat for either too long or too short a period. Often this is just a case of miscalculation, or forgetting the recommended duration or route of administration; however all of these can promote the development of resistant colonies of bacteria. It may also lead to a poor response to treatment, extra cost to the farmer, and a risk of toxicity. It is important to also remember that any deviation from the license claim may lead to increased residues and as such a statutory minimum withdrawal period for milk of 7 days should be applied (28 days for meat).

In fact, including an antibiotic dry cow tube can actually increase the risk of mastitis being caused by coliform bacteria because of reduced commensal population.

These are:
- Improving prevention of infections, optimising prescribing practices
- Improving education
- Developing new medicines and diagnostics
- Better use of surveillance data
- Better research into antimicrobial resistance
- Strengthened international collaboration.

In September 2013, the 5 Year Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy was published following collaboration between the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) who controls the medicines we use as vets, the Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh governments and the UK public health agencies. They have produced 7 key points for limiting the development of antimicrobial resistance.

Where we can work hard as an industry together with clients is on the first 4 points. The old adage that prevention is better than cure is as true as it has ever been and the best way to ensure medicines are only used when they need to be is to not need to use them! In particular the prescribing practices target a reduced use of cephalosporins and fluoroquinolones. The use of both these drugs has been linked to an increase in Clostridium difficile cases in hospitals. Some milk buyers and processors are already taking steps regarding these medicines – for example recording their use separately. The next stage is down to the processors and supermarkets but it is likely to be more stringent, not less.

So what does this actually mean to you as a farmer? If we take the situation of acute systemic mastitis as an example to work through we can look at how RUMA principles impact on this.

The first point to reiterate is that prevention of mastitis will always use less antibiotics than treatment. This may seem obvious, but with half the of UK herds having clinical mastitis rates of over 40 cases per 100 cows, there is still room for improvement. Ultimately with environmental behaviour as shown by most E coli, dirty cows get more mastitis than clean cows, so by paying more attention to cow comfort, cleanliness and parlour routine, medicines usage can be reduced.
Using suitable amounts of fresh, clean bedding for dry cows through to low yielders, with suitable space allowances will be the easiest way to reduce the cases of mastitis and the medicines used to treat it. Remember that precalving cows are at the greatest risk of disease and as such should be the cleanest cows on the farm. Obviously a well performing parlour is the other pre-requisite to good mastitis control and this is frequently overlooked. Something as simple as changing liners at 3000 milkings rather than 2500 can be responsible for increased levels of acute mastitis.

Specific to acute toxic mastitis, we know that assistance at calving and subclinical or clinical milk fever are major risk factors for toxic E coli mastitis. Cows with assisted calvings are 11 times more likely to get E coli mastitis. Cows with milk fever are 23 times more likely. So sound breeding policies and good transition cow nutrition are key to minimising E coli mastitis in freshly calved cows.

So a cow gets acute mastitis and is looking toxic. Does RUMA mean we can’t treat her? No – in fact the opposite. Remember as little as possible, as much as necessary. But we do need to consider which antibiotics we should be using and how.

**With a toxic mastitis case, the speed of treatment is of utmost importance.**

Antibiotic selection should be based on likely causal organism – although we associate toxic mastitis cases with E coli, this is often only responsible for 50% of cases sampled. The remainder are other coliforms, or gram positives such as Staph aureus. For this reason we need to be careful about being too selective and making sure the antibiotic used is appropriate. The first thing to say is that without testing, you will never know what that pathogen is likely to be. Sterile samples taken before treatment are an invaluable tool. Mark them with the cow number, quarter and date and then put them in the freezer. When you have enough send them to the lab. This will help us make sure that the injectable antibiotic choice is appropriate to the future cases on your farm. That may mean moving away from traditional antibiotics towards more broad spectrum ones.

**So how long do we treat for?**

This is a really difficult question, and at the recent mastitis panel meeting, 20 eminent mastitis consultants could not agree on this one!

A good argument could be put forward for treating until the milking after clinical resolution, though any increase in treatments above those recommended by the manufacturer risk bulk tank failures unless appropriate withdrawal periods are observed, and ideally a commercial antibiotic test passed. Duration of treatment should be the subject of discussion with your advising veterinary surgeon.

It is important to consider that antibiotics only work with the help of the cow. This fits well into RUMA principles – by helping the cow help herself we can reduce medicine usage. This can mean something as simple (and too often overlooked) as giving her a clean, comfortable bed with minimal moving needed to access clean water and fresh, palatable food. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories should be considered an essential part of the treatment of toxic mastitis and should be given as soon as possible. With acute, systemic mastitis, toxins from the bacteria are absorbed into the blood stream and cause widespread inflammation which is responsible for the clinical signs we see. Reducing that inflammation, plus the inflammation in the udder is important for recovery. Equally, it can mean using other tools in our armoury such as intravenous or oral fluid support, provision of calcium either orally or intravenously or oxytocin to assist with milk out. The toxins which circulate around the body in toxic mastitis cases often bind the calcium in the blood which can make the situation worse.

**The removal of the toxins and bacteria will help speed up recovery.**

Stripping out the milk as often and thoroughly as possible will aid recovery – consider milking the cow at the start of milking, and again at the end of each milking with oxytocin given at least 5 minutes beforehand to ensure thorough strip-out. This can then be supplemented with two handstrips between milkings.

So in conclusion, Responsible Use of Medicines is a concept the farmers should be happy to engage with, as the consequences are often beneficial to their business and animals. Medicine decisions should be made in consultation with your advising veterinary surgeon but follow the adage ‘as little as possible, as much as necessary’.

Phil Elkins BVM&S MRCVS
Ketosis – simple and novel approaches to control

Ketosis is a major and often hidden cause of cows failing to fulfil their production and reproductive potential.

Ketosis is also known as acetonemia and is the result of a cow not meeting its energy requirements. Ketosis frequently goes unnoticed as the signs are not immediately apparent; however it is a common condition.

Recent survey work carried out at Westpoint has revealed that 32% of cows calved less than 3 weeks have sub-clinical ketosis. At these levels of ketosis, we can predict a raised rate of occurrence of disorders such as displaced abomasum and metritis, with reduced milk yields and impaired fertility.

We have recognised the risks of ketosis for many years and for many years we have attempted to control ketosis with energy additives. These have included propylene glycol drenches or in-feed and rumen-bypass energy sources.

Many of these can be useful, however it is clear that all we are doing by using these methods is the equivalent of putting higher octane fuels in an engine. But we are doing nothing about the inherent efficiency of the engine and in real terms we are in danger of pushing production too hard or getting cows too fat.

Now, we have access to monensin – a rumen additive that has been used for many years. This is available as the Kexxtone bolus, which is given to the cow 3-4 weeks before calving.

Kexxtone is a fundamentally different approach to energy management in the cow.

Not only does it greatly reduce the risk of ketosis, but also boosts the feed conversion efficiency.

Scoring body condition is the major management tool we must be using to reduce ketosis. This is in particular because over-conditioned cows are prone to fatty liver disease, which is a serious syndrome that underpins so much of ketosis.

So, we have at our disposal both simple management tools and therapeutic approaches to fundamentally improve the feed conversion efficiency of our cows and hugely to reduce the impact of ketosis.

Kumar Sivam BVSc CertCHP MSc MBA MRCVS

The Farming Community Network (FCN)

FCN is a network of some three hundred or so volunteers mostly with a farming background or close link to agriculture, who are organised into county groups throughout England and Wales. They provide pastoral and practical support to farmers and farming families facing difficulties for as long as needed – helping people to find a positive way forward through their problems.

In addition to local groups of volunteers, FCN provides a confidential, national telephone Helpline which is available from 7.00 am until 11.00 pm every day of the year. A confidential email service has just been launched to complement the Helpline offering farmers a chance to get in touch with FCN in whatever way they feel most comfortable with.

FCN is a Christian organisation and registered charity which has been working in the farming community since 1995. It is overseen by a Board of Trustees under the chairmanship of George Dunn. FCN is based in Northamptonshire where a small team undertakes the administrative functions led by Chief Executive, Charles W Smith.

FCN has a clear Christian ethos in all it does. All its services are made available to those in need from all faiths or none in a supportive, non-judgmental, non-proselytising manner.

FCN is part of the Farming Help group of national farm charities. Working together with RABI and The Addington Fund in the farming community; we provide a wide range of complementary support. FCN also works with and alongside many other organisations in order to provide the best available help in each individual situation. This includes professional advice and support where appropriate.

General Enquiries: Tel: 01788 510866 Email: mail@fcn.org.uk
Helpline: 0845 367 9990 chris@fcn.org.uk
Web: www.fcn.org.uk
Paraprofessional Services

At Westpoint we take pride in the range and level of services offered to our clients and the farming community as a whole. Our company ethos is National Strengths, Local Service with this nowhere more evident than in the high level of care and knowledge offered by our team of ten highly trained paraprofessional staff.

Since 2008 our foot trimming and mobility services have grown from one, to a team of five full time trimmers supported by a further three members of staff, both in the office and on farm. All our trimmers have access to specialised hydraulic foot crushes and are National Association of Cattle Foot Trimmers Category 1 qualified, offering a full service on farms from Cornwall to Scotland. The trimmers are all checked on an annual basis by an independent NACFT assessor and are overseen by a team of vets with further qualifications in lameness and mobility management.

Our mobility management services are available to any dairy or beef farmer.

Working closely alongside the farm’s own vet, we see a team approach as vital to getting the best from the investment made in mobility and foot health on farm. We can tailor make a service for the farm with trimming available on an ad-hoc (per head) rate, through to an annual contract where whole herd mobility can be overseen including mobility scoring and foot trimming to fit any farmer’s needs.

A team of five paraprofessionals provide a wide range of other on-farm services: from udder flaming, calf management and freeze branding, through to a range designed to help smallholders and other farms. These trained farm staff work to support both Westpoint vets and external vets in the provision of added healthcare services, which include foot trimming, worming, vaccinating and general management for the small farmer or camelid keeper. We also operate a full cleansing and disinfection service using our own tailor made kit for milking parlours and farm buildings to help maintain the best facilities for the farm.

Chris Hulbert, Paraprofessional Services Manager

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Lungworm

What is it?

Lungworm (Dictyocaulus viviparus) is a parasite which causes problems during the grazing season (mainly mid-late summer but can be earlier), predominantly in areas of mild climate, high rainfall and abundant permanent grass. Certainly up in Cumbria, 2013 has been a good year to be a lungworm!

Which animals are susceptible?

Naïve first season grazing animals are most vulnerable. In this age range, vaccination is the option of choice for control. By combining vaccination with careful monitoring of stock (clinical signs/faecal samples etc), the idea is to allow some exposure without clinical disease taking hold, in order for good immunity to develop with age.

Usually adults are not affected, however whole herd outbreaks or individual cases may occur if adults have failed to be vaccinated or acquire natural immunity and are then exposed to heavy burdens on pastures (e.g. over use of wormers).

Lifecycle

- Put simply, over a period of around 4 weeks infective larvae are ingested from the pasture. They mature inside the cow’s lungs to produce more infective larva which are shed in faeces contaminating the pasture.
- Most larvae die before winter, however if weather conditions allow, they can survive longer or hibernate over winter in animals to propagate development the following spring.
- Untreated, infected animals are main source of fresh infection – have you wormed your bulls? In the Netherlands they assume the adult animal is the main reservoir of infection and target treatments to prevent pasture contamination.

Clinical Signs

The process of the larva migrating and developing damages the lungs and inflames the airways, signs include:

- Laboured breathing, reluctance to move, standing with head down, elbows out and neck extended
- Frequent coughing (especially after exercise)
- Reduction in bulk milk tank
- In severe cases death due to the damage/airway obstruction
Prevention is achieved by a combination of vaccination along with monitoring of parasites over the grazing season.

Economic Impact

Costs of lost milk production can reach up £3/head/day (lost milk can account for 51% of total costs in an outbreak). (NADIS bulletin pge-lungworm)

Diagnosis

Patent infections can be demonstrated by detecting lungworm larva in faeces (ideally directly from the cow, not off the ground).

Treatment & Prevention

Most of the anthelmintics available will kill lungworms; however there are many considerations when deciding on treatment (milk/meat withdrawals, treating other parasites, route of treatment etc.).

Prevention is achieved by a combination of vaccination along with monitoring of parasites over the grazing season (i.e. only using anthelmintics when needed). Lungworm vaccines are effective, and best used pre-turn-out.

There is no “one strategy fits all” so it is best to consult your vet to devise a parasite prevention and treatment plan tailored to your farm!

Charlotte Pennington BVet Med (Hons) MRCVS
Youngstock4life Roadshow

By Emma Eastham

The Westpoint Veterinary Group Youngstock4life Roadshow was the fourth in a series of five national roadshows taking place throughout the UK for cattle farmers.

The talks covered various aspects of youngstock management and monitoring as well as providing information on how youngstock health and performance can be maximised.

Dr Tim Potter of Westpoint Veterinary Group leads the Youngstock Advisory Group and as such is responsible for ensuring that the quality of advice given on youngstock within Westpoint is of the highest standards. He explained that to properly understand how a system is performing, you need information. This information can be used to identify areas of potential improvement, or simply to check that you are on target for your own specific goals. In calf rearing, one of the most important indicators of performance is daily live weight gain (DLWG) and getting it right is essential for long term performance and the profitability of your business. He also explained that it is important to have a plan in place so that everyone involved in the process understands what the targets are and how they are going to be achieved.

The most important step in ensuring health of calves is making sure they get sufficient, good quality colostrum in the first 24 hours. Colostrum provides immunoglobulins that provide the immunity the calf requires to fight disease in the first couple months of life. Farms where calves fail to consume sufficient colostrum will often experience problems with diseases such as pneumonia and scours. As a rule of thumb, it is suggested that calves get three litres within the first six hours, depending on the quality of colostrum. With this in mind, it is important to remember the 4 Q's: Quality, Quantity, Quickly and Quietly.

It is important to remember that a calf is not a small cow and their digestive system takes time to fully develop. Calves should start to be offered pasture/forage/dry feed from approximately 7 days old as this then enters the rumen to get microbe establishment. Concentrates stimulate papilla formation which are responsible for absorption of nutrients within the rumen and the fibre in forage stimulates rumination. Water is also a vital nutrient as it helps improve solid feed intake and rumen microbe development. Weaning should only take place once the rumen is sufficiently developed, failure to manage weaning well can result in a stall in growth rates and potentially contribute to outbreaks of disease.

Another important element of youngstock management is disease prevention.

Bovine Respiratory Disease is a huge cost to the dairy and beef industries, both from a welfare and economic point of view. Most recent studies indicate that the average cost per case is £82 in a suckler herd and £43 in a dairy bred calf. Pneumonia at a young age often impacts on the animal’s future welfare and productivity, which is why it is important to consider early control of this disease.

Early veterinary intervention and good diagnostics are key to help find out which pathogens are present on a unit. This will then enable the implementation of an appropriate vaccination programme early as an aid to pneumonia control.

Youngstock management is key to profitable and sustainable cattle farming. Given the financial and resource challenges facing farmers, to get the balance right requires a high level of management and expertise. The Westpoint Youngstock Advisory Group has designed a Youngstock4life plan to allow proactive control of youngstock health for your farm, aimed at ensuring the next generation of animals achieve maximum productivity. This is achieved through a structured approach to monitoring, interventions and routine procedures for a known cost. This plan is open to all cattle farmers wanting to improve their youngstock management.

For further information on the Youngstock4life programme or future events, please contact your local vet or head office on 01306 628086 or visit www.westpointfarmvets.co.uk.
Sheep Challenges for 2014

I wish we could see the future, it would make things a lot easier but unfortunately we haven’t reached that potential yet.

In the meantime we have to try predicting what could happen next year, using available data from NADIS (National Animal Disease Information Services), SCOPS and EBLEX, which are all available online, to reduce the effect it will have on UK flocks. Obviously weather will have a significant impact on the sheep industry and we are still seeing some backlash from 2012’s washout. Fluke is high on everyone’s agenda, particularly with increased triclabendazole resistance. Scotland is seeing a higher prevalence of liver fluke this year as animals are imported from flukey areas, infecting the relatively clean land which had previously negligible levels of fluke eggs. This will impact on the treatment protocols currently in place and more farmers should be considering fluke in their quarantine dosing. Equally southern areas of the UK are at risk following a warm and wet winter and fluke will have still been infecting sheep throughout the season. Fencing off or avoiding very wet areas where the fluke survive outside of the host, until at least February 2014 will reduce the number of early stage fluke being picked up and will subsequently reduce the output of eggs onto pasture; along with treating the egg-producing adult fluke already in the sheep.

Using triclabendazole to remove the younger stages of fluke is vital in high risk farms (based on disease history and current monitoring) but if resistance has already been detected and alternative drugs are used, it is necessary to retreat again in 4-6 weeks. Continuing to monitor any sudden deaths and abattoir reports will provide a good knowledge of prevalence on your farm. Flock health plans need to be tailored to your farm so ask your vet the best way to reduce losses.

Schmallenberg disease (SBV) is still on our radar and results of vaccination will be seen in 2014. Uptake of the SBV vaccine has been variable, but its release was well timed for flocks and the license for single vaccination meant it was less challenging to incorporate into a potentially already busy vaccination schedule. Flocks which have been unaffected in previous seasons are still at risk of exposure, especially following the mild early autumn and with results from affected farms showing inconsistent antibody levels, we may see further signs of malformations.

The October reports of lambs’ going for slaughter suggested that there was an excess of light lambs and rather than fattening them up to weight, farmers were selling before winter set in. Alarm bells ring that if there are so many lambs going before they’re ready, how many ewe lambs will be served under weight? Implications of this are ewe/lamb misalignment and poor colostrum production, leading to poor doing lambs and protracted lambing periods if mating has been delayed for the ewe lambs. Conversely this year has provided good conditions for grass growth and there is also a risk of over fat ewes at tupping. Remember to body condition score ewes at scanning and split groups to provide optimum nutrition for lambing. By altering feed in the second trimester ewes will be able to reach the correct size without affecting their metabolic status at lambing.

Ultimately something is always at risk of surprising us, but by pre-planning and over estimating when it comes to feed requirements, we can minimise the effect it may have. A proactive approach by including your vet to produce a flock health plan will help when it comes to tackling the challenges of 2014.

Becky Adamczyk BVet Med MRCVS
**Gastrointestinal parasitism is a major problem in sheep production, estimated to cost approximately £84 million per annum to the British sheep industry (Moredun 2013).**

If we are increasingly selecting resistant parasites, where will this figure go up to? It’s important to manage resistance development. The “survival of the fittest” concept applies well to parasites, mainly because these amazing organisms have found a way to adapt and reproduce in hard times and pass those traits to the next generation.

Anthelmintic overuse is a major predisposing factor for anthelmintic resistance, although others should also be considered. There needs to be a better understanding of how resistant parasites develop, focusing on the risk factors and prevention. Common and mundane tasks such as drenching should be taken seriously. Actions like under-dosing, incorrect bodyweights, and usage of leftover/out of date anthelmintics could represent a potential for selection of resistant parasites. If new sheep are being brought to your farm, it is essential to follow a quarantine protocol to avoid the introduction of resistant parasites.

As a vet, my view is that we must promote and develop new control strategies to help and educate farmers about this topic.

Old strategies like regular worming, are no longer the best method for parasite control. Faecal Egg Count (FEC) monitoring i.e. measuring worm eggs in dung at different times of the summer, provides information about the parasite burden of a flock and can help in decision making about the need for treatment with an anthelmintic. Most of the time, resistance is only noticed when it’s too late, as farmers only respond when the clinical signs become too obvious. The “survival of the fittest” concept applies well to parasites, mainly because these amazing organisms have found a way to adapt and reproduce in hard times and pass those traits to the next generation. Actions like under-dosing, incorrect bodyweights, and usage of leftover/out of date anthelmintics could represent a potential for selection of resistant parasites. If new sheep are being brought to your farm, it is essential to follow a quarantine protocol to avoid the introduction of resistant parasites.

**Is orf a problem in your flock?**

Orf is a viral disease which mainly affects the skin around the nose and mouth of lambs, or the udder of ewes. Affected animals classically develop painful scabs in these areas and it often results in decreased food intake in lambs, or mastitis in ewes. This is a very contagious disease and often the disease will spread rapidly through a group of animals (and their handlers!). Infection is introduced to a flock either by infected animals or infected material or equipment. It must be remembered that this disease is zoonotic and so gloves must be worn when handling infected animals, and hands washed as well to avoid some painful sores of your own! If you suspect orf is affecting your stock, samples can be submitted to confirm the diagnosis. As this disease is caused by a virus, there is no direct treatment but antibiotics can help to control any secondary infections. A vaccine is available for prevention, however it is only advisable to use it in flocks with confirmed orf infection. Lambs can be vaccinated from 1 day old, and immunity will take 1 – 2 months to develop.

Adult ewes can also be vaccinated – it is recommended that this is done 7- 8 weeks prior to lambing. The vaccine is given by scratching the skin behind the elbow and it must be noted the scabs which develop as a result, can spread the virus. As always prevention is best, so good biosecurity practices and active health planning can help to avoid introduction of this disease.

If you are concerned about this condition, talk it through with your vet; this may save you some problems.

**Shona Young BVMS MRCVS**
Lambing time is the most important time of the year for sheep farmers and as it comes closer it is important to be prepared. Preparation should include the lambing area as well as any extra equipment you might need. It might sound obvious but make sure you have the lambing area clean and ready for use in plenty of time and there are enough hurdles and buckets to use, it is amazing where they disappear to throughout the year! You should ensure you have a way of warming cold lambs; this could be a heat lamp suspended approx. 1m above the lamb or a warming box, these warm and dry the lamb by allowing air to circulate around it.

It is a good idea to have a thermometer in the box to ensure the lamb doesn’t get too hot. You should be aiming for around 38.5°C. If you don’t have either of these you can get creative with a fan heater and a dog crate to produce the desired effect. Those of you lucky enough to have an Aga might already be used to it housing lambs for this purpose.

A box or bag to keep handy with the essentials should include gloves, lube and ropes for any ewes needing assistance. Also in this box/bag should be strong (10%) iodine spray so navels can be treated as soon as possible ensuring complete coverage, dips can also be used but sprays are generally more hygienic. You may want to keep tail rings and elastrators in here as well, don’t forget it is a legal requirement when docking lamb’s tails that you leave it long enough to cover the vulva in female lambs and anus in male lambs.

A clean bucket ready to fill with warm water and a few clean towels should be kept close by to use when a ewe needs assistance, a disinfectant such as hibiscrub (chlorhexadine) is suitable for washing hands, equipment or vaginal prolapses.

It is vital to get colostrum into a lamb as soon as possible and if it doesn’t suckle enough by itself you have to be prepared to step in. Lambs require 50ml per kg of bodyweight within 6 hours, this works out as around 200ml for an average lamb. You might want to freeze some colostrum from another ewe to thaw when it is needed, use 200ml bottles to help get the correct quantities. Or you can buy powdered colostrum to make up with warm water when it is needed. Either way you will need a way of heating it (not a microwave!) and a stomach tube and 50ml syringe to feed it with. It is essential this equipment is thoroughly washed between uses, baby sterilising liquid is a good way of ensuring equipment is adequately clean.

Lambing Box

- Gloves
- Lube
- Ropes/snare
- 10% Iodine spray
- Clean Rings + elastrators
- Colostrum powder/frozen colostrum stored in 200ml bottles
- Stomach tube / lamb feeder and appropriate syringe
- Baby sterilising fluid
- Disinfectant (Chlohexadine)
- Towels
- Bucket for water
- Thermometer
- Calcium (calciject CMD 20, No 6)
- 40% Glucose for intraperitoneal injections
- Syringes (5, 10, 20 and 50ml)
- Needles (18G1”, 19G1”)
- Twin lamb treatment drench
- Antibiotic injection (according to farm protocols)
- Prolapse retainer
- Oral antibiotic for watery mouth if indicated by your health plan
- Non-steroidal anti inflammatory injection

A thermometer to take temperatures of anything looking under the weather should be kept to hand, a lamb’s temperature should be 38.5-39.5°C . . .

. . . and if it is below 37°C, the lamb is hypothermic and needs immediate attention. A ewe with a temperature over 40°C will require treatment. Protocols for dealing with hypothermic lambs and pyrexic ewes should be in your health plan.

Also on the shelf should be treatments for common lambing problems. I would recommend some calcium (calciject no 6, CMD 20), use 50-80ml injected under the skin, some twin lamb drench and a broad spectrum antibiotic and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory injections as identified in your health plan. To accompany these - a supply of sterile needles (18G 1” and 19G1”) and syringes (5, 10 and 20ml plus 50ml for Calcium injections). Intraperitoneal injection of 40% glucose can be life saving for a hypothermic lamb; get your vet to show you how and keep a bottle of injectable glucose nearby. If you have previously had a problem with watery mouth and your vet has recommended using preventative antibiotics, you should get this ready on the shelf for when you start to see problems.

By spending some time before lambing gets underway organising these things, you will find you have one less thing to worry about when the time comes.

Lesley Bingham BVM&S MRCVS
INFORMATION

Calf Diagnostics

When faced with a disease outbreak, choosing the appropriate treatment and management interventions are key to minimise the potential losses; but it is also important to look at how similar outbreaks can be prevented in the future.

A key part of this is diagnostic testing, which allows us to identify the underlying cause and make the correct recommendations. With this in mind Farmlab has recently extended its offering to enable us to rapidly test samples from cases of pneumonia to identify the causative organisms.

“Respkit” is a diagnostic package recently launched by Farmlab to aid in the diagnosis of pneumonia. Using the same PCR technology as Mastikit; the Respkit service allows us to test samples collected from outbreaks of pneumonia for all the common pathogens (both viruses and bacteria). The test can be run on samples collected by swabbing the back of affected calves’ noses or on samples collected by bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL).

The Respkit package includes testing for both viruses (PI3, IBR, RSV and bovine coronavirus) and bacteria (Pasteurella Multocida, Mannheimia Haemolytica, Histophilus Somni and Mycoplasma Bovis). Whilst the Pasteurella Multocida and Mannheimia Haemolytica are most commonly identified, we are seeing increasing number of cases associated with Mycoplasma Bovis. Mycoplasma infection frequently presents as chronic pneumonias, leading to animals developing head tilts and droopy ears. If you see any animals with these symptoms please get in touch with your local Westpoint practice for advice.

Alongside the Respkit package, Farmlab continues to offer diagnostic services for the other commonly encountered calf disease, namely scour. There are a number of different organisms that can cause scour in calves. Viruses such as rotavirus and coronavirus are widespread and commonly cause watery diarrhooa in young calves; they can be controlled through vaccination of cows prior to calving, coupled with ensuring that calves receive sufficient colostrum and that good hygiene is maintained. Various bacteria can also cause scour; E.coli, Salmonella (which may have zoonotic implications) and Clostridia all cause severe diarrhooa in calves. The two other main infectious causes of scour in calves are cryptosporidiosis and coccidiosis and require specific treatments and hence accurate diagnostics is essential.

Scour pathogens can be identified by examination of faecal samples from affected calves. It is important to diagnose what is the cause of the scour to ensure the correct treatment is given and enable measures to be put in place to minimise the chance of occurrence in the future. If you are having problems with scour in your calves we recommend you speak to you vet for advice and organise the submission of faecal samples for analysis.

Tim Potter BVet Med PhD MRCVS

A new world-class School of Veterinary Medicine will be launched at the University of Surrey in 2014, constructed around the theme that human and animal health is intrinsically linked. The announcement of the plans shows how the new School will embrace the ‘One Health – One Medicine’ philosophy and will include the development of a research-led veterinary medicine degree programme with an emphasis on research, veterinary pathology and livestock medicine.

Westpoint Veterinary Group will be a key livestock focussed partner with the new School of Veterinary Medicine at Surrey building upon already strong relationships with the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA), the BBSRC Pirbright Institute and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD).

Currently there are only seven Schools of Veterinary Medicine in the country, and Surrey will be the eighth school in the country. The setting for the development at the heart of the University of Surrey’s Manor Park site in Guildford will encourage collaboration of students and staff from different disciplines, with those studying towards a veterinary medicine qualification being exposed to cutting edge technology in engineering and physics as well as receiving training in core business skills. We look forward to developing this exciting new project.

Jon Mouncey BVet Med DBR MRCVS
Swine Flu

Who should worry - Pigs, birds, or people?

Swine influenza has the potential to infect all three groups, but that does not mean it is likely to, and despite media hype, it is not common for swine adapted strains to spread from man to man, or bird to bird. But those in close contact should be aware it’s a possibility. How serious is it? Studies have shown that significant numbers of swine workers have shown exposure to swine adapted flu strains without illness. Flu is common in pigs, but excepting those headline pandemic strains, the chance of contracting flu from your stock is negligible. In fact during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, your pigs would be more likely to contract it from you!

The influenza virus works on just eight gene strands, but it is so dynamic, the gene each strand carries is constantly evolving. And if two different flu strains infect the same host cell, we get reassortment - a mix and match effect with the potential for totally new gene combinations. This is why there are so many different types in the world. And flu strains are labelled by just two of those eight genes, those responsible for the spike proteins “visible” on the surface of the virus – the ‘H’ (haemagglutinin) and the ‘N’ (neuraminidase) that give the viruses their names. But all eight have a role in deciding whether infection, illness and transmission can occur in any host species. H1N1 has been common in pigs for years, but this does not mean it is the same as the one which made headlines in 2009. That was a reassortment of pig, bird and human adapted flu genes together, which must be considered a freak event. Reassortment is a random process, not controlled.

The concern for human health is if we get a new type of virus that has very different ‘H’ and, or ‘N’ spikes from the types of human adapted flu we have had in the past. That would be a necessary factor to avoid our historic immunity. But also the other six genes must reassort into a combination that is capable of infecting, and causing harm. This is a bit of a long-shot in itself, but for the combination to also mean the virus is able to spread from man to man reduces the odds of a major pandemic significantly. It is even less likely for bird flu to cause a human pandemic.

So, who should worry about swine flu?

Since 2009 we have seen the pandemic H1N1 recombine with a classic pig adapted H3N2 to form a novel H1N2 virus which spreads more readily amongst pigs. Infected pigs show sudden-onset fever, with coughing and breathing difficulties. This is associated with reluctance to eat, drop-off in performance and occasionally death, because of haemorrhages in the lungs and inflammation in the airways. It can spread over distances of a kilometre, so being closed is no guarantee of staying free.

What can I do?

- Investigate all respiratory problems fully with your vet Discuss with your vet about bloods and nasal swabs.
- Consider vaccination.
- Discuss anti-inflammatory therapy with your vet, for affected pigs.

Ian Roper BVet Med MRCVS
Monitoring

The price of pigs may have picked up a little, but things are still tight.

Few would argue that every penny counts, and optimising all facets of production means the difference between profit or loss. So consider which areas are the least efficient, and thus where losses can be recouped most effectively. How do you know which these areas are? If anything is drastically amiss, you are likely to deal with it straight away, which means it is often the less obvious aspects which hurt you in a prolonged fashion.

There is lots of useful information available to us, and in many instances we are ignoring it. Computerised records and automated systems are the norm in large scale commercial units, and these can bring reams of information and analysis to an enterprise. But a lot can also be achieved with a simple spreadsheet or pen and ink.

I would start with the basics of the bottom line. Never lose sight of quality and welfare, but kilograms of meat produced is the ultimate figure.

Consistency is important to compare one batch with another. Don’t forget that feed conversion efficiency is just as important as pure growth, so also record the amount of food going in. The other major facet is numbers, meaning fertility and litter sizes on the one hand, and mortality on the other.

Rodent control training for pig units

BPEX is running rodent control training workshops tailored specifically for pig units.

It can be difficult to eradicate rodent populations from pig units, with the ample feed, water and harbourage they provide and, when farmers add up the costs associated with an infestation, it can be a wake-up call.

Adrian Meyer, from FarmTrain, has worked with BPEX to develop and build the workshop content. He says: “A main component of the course is educating participants about rodent behaviour. It’s almost impossible to gain control of the problem if you don’t understand how they behave.

“For example, rats are creatures of habit and are likely to take food from the same place once they’ve identified a source, whereas mice are much more inquisitive and inclined to vary their feeding locations.”

Practical advice on control is centred on removing a rat’s harbourage. “It’s almost impossible to deny rodents food and water on a pig farm and therefore every effort should be made to remove harbourage.”

The workshops enable attendees to plan, implement and monitor a rodent control programme that is specific to their local environment, using a range of safe and effective control methods.

BPEX’s interim veterinary projects manager, Helen Clarke says: “Pig units present a unique set of challenges in the battle against the rodent and there has been a lack of sector specific training.

“It’s in response to this, and in recognition of forthcoming changes to rodent control stewardship, that we are running this series of pilot rodent control workshops. They will help ensure that the pig industry complies and leads the way in responsible use of rodenticides stewardship.”

There are workshops planned in Bury St Edmunds, Shepton Mallet and Boroughbridge during February and March 2014 and more can be organised if producers in other locations would like them.

Contact BPEX Knowledge Transfer Manager
Richard Bows: 07816 941223

For instance one farm through monitoring was able to detect that over twice as many piglets were born dead during cold weather, and focussing on this has enabled improvements of an extra live piglet per ten litters. Many figures are recorded anyway, and we would be happy to help you analyse and review them.

Some may wish to consider more automated systems, like flow monitors on the drinking water, which can detect problems in a group before we would unaided. But any extra information is likely to give you an edge, and the knowledge of how to improve efficiency.

Ian Roper BVet Med MRCVS
Mastitis in alpacas, not to be missed!

Although not an overly common problem in alpacas, prompt attention is required should mastitis be suspected.

Detection will depend on the type of mastitis. Detection of subclinical mastitis requires the testing of all quarters. Chronic mastitis may only show up as periodic changes in the milk composition while acute mastitis is most often associated with the period around unpacking.

Mastitis is characterised by heat, swelling, hardness and pain on palpation of the affected gland and the secretion will vary in consistency, away from normal. Acute mastitis may first be picked up when the cria fails to thrive or the mother is observed not allowing the cria to suckle.

Careful observation of the nursing behaviour of the cria together with observation and palpation of the udder will allow early detection of problems.

Treatment will require the use of systemic antibiotics and/or anti-inflammatory. Use of standard cattle intramammary treatments is not practical; the streak canal openings are very small and each teat is associated with two non-communicating glands therefore both streak canals would need to be infused which is very difficult to achieve properly. It is therefore necessary to use injectable (systemic) antibiotics. It is important to remember however that no antibiotics are licenced for use in alpacas and choice of drug should be at the guidance of your vet.

Culture and sensitivity testing of the milk from affected glands is recommended. Samples should be taken and frozen prior to treatment commencing. Stripping of the gland should also be done on a daily basis in conjunction with treatment.

Providing it is seen and actioned early, mastitis responds well to antibiotic therapy with the outcome being a return to normal milk production levels and normal gland attributes within a few days of the start of treatment.

So, take home message... if you observe mum refusing to let the cria suckle or the cria not trying to suckle, check out the udder! And if you have any worries... call your vet.

Peter Aitken BVSc MACVSc MRCVS

Smallholders – what we can offer you

Being a smallholder and having smaller numbers of animals to look after doesn’t mean you don’t suffer from the same problems other farmers do. Therefore working alongside your local Westpoint vet could be beneficial for not just your animals, but also any revenue you make.

For example your sheep and cattle can still have worm and fluke problems, causing them to become ill, not grow as well and potentially lose condition. Using the FECcheck kits to test for worm burdens, you can make sure you are treating your animals correctly with the right product for the right problem, and preventing them from becoming ill.

Preventing diseases within your flock/ herd is also a very important aspect for anyone who owns livestock, whether it be 2 sheep or 50 cows.

The best way to do this is to make a herd health plan with your vet and undertake active health planning. You will discuss and go over any potential issues that you may come up against in the next year or review past problems you may have had and find solutions to control them. It is also a good opportunity to go over protocols such as when to worm or vaccinate your animals, and your vet can answer any questions you have about your livestock.

If you would like us to assist with getting the best out of your animals and maintain their health and wellbeing, get in touch with your local Westpoint practice and see what we can do to help you achieve this. We also offer regular training meetings for smallholders, so keep an eye out for the details!

Erin Caswell BVet Med MRCVS
Alpacas and the medicines we use!

Recently in the farming and rural press there has been quite a highlight with regards to the responsible use of medicines in farm animals.

Although we don’t tend to see many alpacas entering the food chain there is still good reason to consider them in a similar light to other farm animals with regards to the use of medicines.

As a profession we are striving to take an active role in the responsible prescribing and use of medicines to aid in reducing the risks of developing antibiotic resistance, but also for other products such as anthelmintics (wormers) for which we know there is already widespread resistance in sheep and has also now been described in alpacas. This is achievable through sensible use and prescribing of medication to ensure that we are seeking to mitigate potential problems.

As alpaca owners, you are all already aware of the fact that all medication is “off licence” when being used in alpacas. This means that none of the products we use have been tested on alpacas to determine the appropriate data required for licencing; this includes antibiotics and all other medications be it wormers, vaccines or anti-inflammatory.

So how do we know what to use if nothing is licenced?

Most of what we use is used with either previous experience of efficacy, or based on research that has been undertaken or information that has been made available from sources such as universities or leading experts in the camelid medicine field; they are products that have been tried and tested. Unfortunately this is not the same as licenced but is evidence based in its approach to ensure the best treatment options are made available to your alpacas. Products are able to be selected and used according to the Cascade by your vet.

Occasionally there will be situations that arise, despite all reasonable precautions being taken, where animals will react to medications that they are given in a way we do not expect. We cannot predict when this will occur although save to say incidences are few and far between. Reactions can occur to any medications, be they licenced or not and will often depend on the individual animal to which they are administered. Any reactions other than a suitable response to the treatment administered should always be reported back to your vet. These could include lumps forming, hair loss or anything deemed to be adverse.

Alpacas are also still subject to the rules of other farm animals when it comes to the recording of any treatments administered. All treatments should be recorded with basic details such as to whom they were given, how much and what product(s) and the batch numbers and expiry dates of the product(s) being used. Routine treatments can be reviewed.

The term “off licence” should not strike fear into you, but due to the costs associated with licencing to the drug companies and the small market size (in comparison to other farmed species) that is there for the licenced product, I doubt we will see them bringing them out in the near future.

If you are unsure what products should and should not be used then please discuss it with your local vet who will be able to advise you on what can and cannot be used safely in alpacas.

Peter Aitken BVSc MACVSc MRCVS
Farmer and Vet Charity ‘Skiathon’

On Thursday 24th January 2013, Robert Warnock of Capel Church Dairy Farm and Alex Walters, Associate Director of Westpoint Veterinary Group attempted to ski 50 miles in a single day in the popular ski resort of Val d’Isere, France.

Rob Warnock, a dairy client of Westpoint Ashford orchestrated the fundraising event in order to raise vital funding for William Harvey Hospital children’s ward, ‘Padua’.

Rob has been motivated to fundraise for this worthy cause following the unfortunate diagnosis of leukaemia in his daughter, Maddie Warnock. The target of 50 miles is significant being the approximate distance between the two hospitals currently treating Maddie for Leukaemia, the Royal Marsden Hospital in Surrey and the William Harvey Hospital, Ashford.

Alex and Rob had to carry out time trials during the first couple of days’ reconnaissance and it soon became apparent that the challenge was heavily dependent upon repetitively getting up the mountain quickly enough rather than actually getting down again.

The pair eventually skied just over 102km (about 62 miles) and almost skied 10 vertical miles, top speeds were recorded in excess of 100kph - but they weren’t done in a hour unfortunately!

They both got home safe and sound and were really impressed with the fund raising ‘burst’ which was in action whilst they were away!

Sponsorship for this ‘skiathon’ fundraiser has been gratefully received and the current total lies short of £1500. Please contact Rob Warnock for further information on donations r.warnock@hotmail.co.uk

Thanks so much for all your support!
Alex Walters BVSc MBIAC MRCVS
South Africa

Early in 2013 I went to South Africa, to provide some milk quality consultancy. This was at the invitation of one of the pharmaceutical companies, as part of a support programme to dairy farmers using their product.

South Africa has 2,200 dairy farmers at the last count in 2012. 60% of milk is sold as liquid, the rest as concentrated products. The industry there faces similar issues to those of UK farmers, albeit perhaps a few years behind our situation. There is a steadily increasing demand for dairy products in SA and with neighbouring African countries, but there is increasing pressure from exporters such as Ireland.

Milk quality seems to be rather less of a focus than in the UK: many contracts do not have cell count penalties, and those that do penalise producers generally have a penalty band starting at 500,000 cells / ml, rather than the more stringent UK figures.

As in the UK, there is a wide variation in the type of dairy farm, ranging from 24/7 housed or feedlot cows fed maize and alfalfa silage, typically in the more arid parts near the Cape, to pasture based systems in the more eastern and coastal areas.

Anyway, I had a fast and furious week there, visiting 9 farms to perform a mastitis review and parlour workup in 7 days. My general impressions were that South African farmers have the advantage of abundant cheap but uneducated and relatively poorly skilled labour (there would typically be 6-8 workers in a parlour which in the UK would be comfortably handled by 1 man). Milking machine technology is not of the standard generally seen in the UK, which, on the farms visited, had resulted in serious issues with infectious mastitis. Staph aureus was a major pathogen on all of the farms visited. Teat sealants are not available yet in SA, reflected in some amazingly high figures for early lactation and toxic mastitis. Things may not be so bad in the UK after all!

Keith Baxter BVet Med MRCVS

London Night Rider 2013

Cycling through the night in London covering 72 miles was not something I had ever thought I’d ever do or, more importantly, would want to do in my lifetime. However, on 8th June 2013 I found myself doing just that, along with 6 other nutty friends and about 2,000 other cyclists, all raising money for various charities.

With dry weather and a clear night, we set off at 10.43pm, from Crystal Palace. Who knew London had so many hills!! We had 5 rest stops (all very gratefully used), lots of tea and chocolate, loads of stops at traffic lights, one drunken driver using us as target practice, a close call with a bus and a few people chasing us ??? (it was 3.15am). We finally finished around 8.15am but we knew it wasn’t a race and we wanted to keep together so lots of stopping and starting. In the end I raised over £650 for my chosen charity Breast Cancer Research, a charity very close unfortunately supporting family members and more recently very good friends. I’m so incredibly grateful to all my colleagues at Westpoint, my friends and family that encouraged me through the night, raised money for me and kept me going when I didn’t want to get back on to that saddle again, even if I had extra padding on top of my padding. The thought of the amazing strength that my family and friends had needed to go through their treatment and recovery, kept me going through the night – who was I to moan?

Michelle Baker
We are pleased to announce the launch of ‘The Westpoint Photographic Competition 2014’.  

2014 Theme: The Livestock Farmer’s Year

We would like to capture images throughout the year, depicting the livestock farmer’s calendar. Photos can range from milking to lambing; anything that represents you, the farmer!

The top 10 photos will be displayed on our website and the overall winner will be chosen by our team of judges. There will also be a prize for the best photo featuring some Westpoint merchandise, be it a pen, a leaflet, or a beanie hat!

The winner will receive a Digital SLR Camera and the judge’s favourite ‘Westpoint Merchandise’ photo winner will receive a Compact Digital Camera.

How to Enter
Please e-mail your entry to competition@westpointfarmvets.co.uk and ensure your photo is between 250kb and 5mb in size.

Within your e-mail please include your name, address and contact telephone number. Please also include a note of where your photo was taken.

The competition closes at midnight on Friday 19th December 2014. Entries after the closing date will not be counted.

Terms & Conditions:
1. Entrants must not be professional photographers
2. Photos must be taken in the UK, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man
3. Your photo cannot have won any other competitions
4. Photos must be between 250kb and 5mb in size
5. Images that have had spots, scratches or other blemishes removed, colour enhancements and cropped images are eligible for entry
6. Entrants can enter as many photos as they like
7. Westpoint may use your entries in future marketing material