

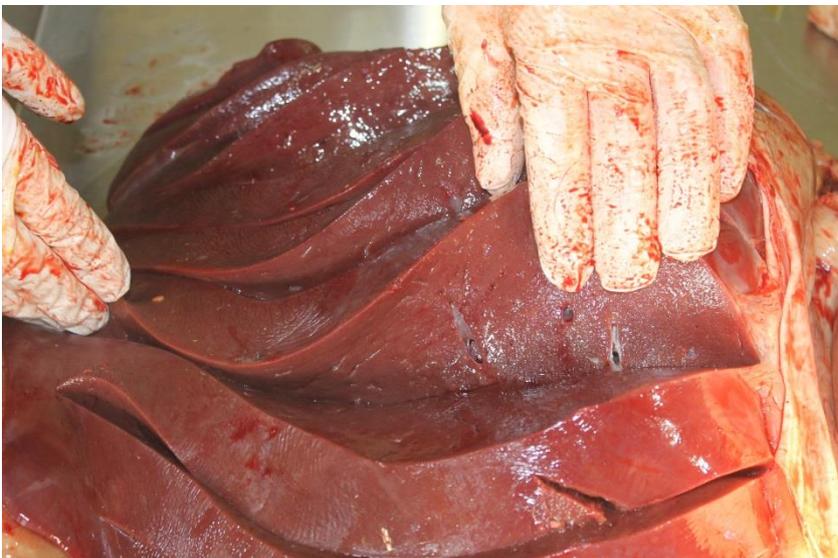
## Lessons to be learnt

With the ever changing economic status of our agricultural industries, farmers can no longer afford to adhere to the old saying 'where there are livestock, there are deadstock'. Dead animals cost money; wasted feed and medicine input and disposal costs all add up before you even consider the potential loss of future production. If however an animal does die unexpectedly, it becomes imperative to try to ascertain the cause of death so that lessons can be learnt which may benefit the rest of your herd or flock.

Sometimes you know why an animal has died, for example, there may be evidence of severe trauma or clinical signs suggestive of a specific disease. Most times, however the nature and extent of the disease process is unknown. In these cases, for example; an outbreak of pneumonia in calves, lambs dying suddenly or cows aborting, a post mortem examination can yield really useful information which may help to limit future losses or indicate the most appropriate treatment for your herd or flock.

When performed correctly, a post-mortem examination (PME) involves looking at the animal as a whole, as well as looking at each individual organ and body system within the carcass. Careful sampling of tissues or fluid for further testing aids in determining the cause of death or disease. This information can then be discussed with your vet to enable a proactive approach to the future health of your animals.

Historically PME's have either been conducted on farm, with the constraints that entails, or at government run Veterinary Investigation Centres (VICs). Following the closure of a number of local VICs, including the one at Polwhele, Truro, Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) has recently launched a network of PME centres operating out of fallen stock sites. As of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 a facility became operational at Statton's, Davidstow enabling a team of local vets, trained and supported by expert pathologists to perform both subsidised and private PMEs to a consistently high standard. In order to qualify for subsidy, a carcass must meet strict criteria set by AHPA. These can be discussed with your vet who must then contact The University of Surrey for authorisation. Any client within a 1 hour radius of APHA's VIC at Starcross, near Exeter, can still utilise these facilities but prior authorisation must still be sought. Carcass transport and disposal costs remain a separate agreement between the farmer and the facility.



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Timing of PME's is crucial. Body tissues start to degrade as soon as 20 minutes after death. It is thus critical that you contact your vet as soon as possible to discuss your options. Ideally PME's are performed as soon as possible after death to preserve tissue viability and ultimately maximise the diagnostic outcome.

Westpoint Farm Vets will shortly be hosting some on site meetings to give farmers an insight into the practicalities of the post-mortem process and witness first-hand the interesting nature of veterinary pathology. If you would be keen to attend please ring our St. Columb practice on 01637 889231 for more details.

**Julie Elkins BVM&S MRCVS**