



### Autumn News

#### Chelmsford

It's been another incredibly busy season at Chelmsford, and it shows very little sign of letting up before we're back into calving season!

Happily, to keep up with demand, there are some new faces (and voices) to welcome. First of all, you may have spoken to our new administrator Amy on the phone. Amy joins us from a veterinary nursing and practice management background, and Mel has done expert job of showing her the ropes.

We've also had some new additions to the veterinary team: experienced vet Caroline joined us at the end of July and is enthusiastic about youngstock and obstetrical work. Melodie also joined in July. Having previously worked as a TB tester, she is no stranger to farm work. Finally, Mia joined in August, fresh from the Royal Vet College. Both Mia and Melodie are on our new graduate scheme, and are already developing their skillsets.

Once again, we are hosting Surrey university students, and hoping to shape the farm vets of the future. We are very thankful to you for providing such excellent learning experiences for them.

In events, we recently hosted a medicines administration course, which was received really well - even though we insisted on audience participation! If you missed it, don't worry; we'll be organising another one very soon. On that note, if there are meetings you would like to see us put on, or if you have any general feedback at all, please get in touch!

Our Christmas Quiz is on Thursday 5th December at 6.30pm at Essex Young Farmers so call us to book your place!

#### Kings Lynn

As we all know the summer is well and truly over. A big thanks, however, to all of you that visited our stand at the Norfolk Show. We had a great time, managed to see lots of familiar faces and plenty of new ones.



Rosanna was called out to a calving recently at JF Temples in Wighton. Out came a set of triplets from a Brown Swiss heifer - all 3 were bull calves and all healthy! See photo above.

Peter recently completed the final leg of a mammoth cycle ride which totalled 3500km and ran from his home in Poland to Santiago de Compostela in North western Spain, following the historical

pilgrimage route of El Camino. Completing the pilgrimage was a 3 year project which he completed this year cycling the final leg from Bordeaux to Santiago. Well done Peter, an amazing feat of endurance!

We will soon be moving to our new practice in East Walton so we will let you know the new address in due course.

#### Louth

Francis Sabbe joined Westpoint Louth at the start of September. He has over 30 years' experience in farm medicine and was previously a Senior Vet and Clinical Director of farm animals in a large practice in Norfolk. Moving to Louth, Francis is looking forward to working with the farming community and becoming involved in all aspects of farming life. He will be supported by his own team of Vets, Foot trimmers and Farm technicians. Westpoint uses its long-established relationship with manufacturers and suppliers to ensure its clients can purchase medicines and supplies at competitive prices.

Francis and his team will be providing around the clock care 365 days of the year. Their service offering includes:

- Routine vet visits
- Bull and ram testing
- Mastitis control and management
- Herd and flock health planning
- TB testing
- Full out of hours emergency services
- Fertility testing and scanning
- Foot trimming and mobility scoring

If you would like to meet Francis, would like more information on the services offered by Francis and his team or you have a farm animal health issue then please call 07983 820560 or email [francis.sabbe@westpointfarmvets.co.uk](mailto:francis.sabbe@westpointfarmvets.co.uk). The team will also be at Louth Market every Thursday if you need any advice or want to pop into the Westpoint office.

**CattleMobility4life**

Farm support services available from Westpoint

- ✓ Foot trimming
- ✓ Mobility scoring
- ✓ Condition scoring
- ✓ Veterinary support

For more information or to book an appointment please call your local practice or contact Chris Hulbert on 07921 214845.

 westpoint farm vets

# Using The Ram to Maximise Your Earnings

by Harry Eastwood BVetMed MRCVS

**With the upcoming uncertainty of sheep and lamb prices with Brexit, minimising losses and maximising outputs has become essential; but how are we going to increase the amount we sell relative to ewe numbers?**

- Lambing percentage
  - i.e. the total number reared
- Growth rates
- Lambing pattern
  - early lambs have more growth time before sale
  - tightly concentrated age ranges benefits lamb health and reduces labour and other input costs.

There are clearly significant ewe factors involved, as well as young-stock management, but the rams have a heavy involvement in the lambing percentage and pattern. Each ram has to be capable of a decent conception rate, to catch as many ewes as possible, as early in the breeding period as possible. The poorer his conception rate, then the more ewes will repeat cycle, and the more that will end up as barren.

A ram's productivity is on a sliding scale too. It's not simply a matter of having a fertile ram. Sub-optimal fertility is far more common than total infertility, although it is possible a physical defect or malformation might prevent him from serving ewes.

A low fertility ram is very difficult to identify especially when working in a large team of rams, as they will get some ewes pregnant. Often the ram will mark a ewe with the raddle but might not be the one getting her pregnant. Approximately 15-20% of rams aren't up to scratch. If it is poor sperm quality that is affecting performance, this can be due to temporary factors; any cause of stress, pain or general illness will affect sperm quality.

Further to this, subfertile rams can actually prevent the more fertile rams from tugging if they are more dominant. Often, I hear people say they like to keep an older ram so he can just do 2 or 3 but this can sometimes lead to poorer overall conception rates.



## So how can you ensure your rams are raring to go?

Make sure there are no health problems leading up to tugging. Rams must be healthy for at least 6-8 weeks prior to the mating season, as sperm production takes this long from start to finish.

- Freedom from lameness is key, not only will this affect sperm production, but it also interferes with the ram's ability and desire to get about and serve ewes.
- Control of ectoparasites, eg. lice or scab.
- Control of worms and fluke. This may be better done by checking faecal egg counts rather than by blind dosing, and that's a separate conversation to have with your vet.
- Body condition. The rams should have a score of 3.5-4 out of 5 and, like the ewes, should be on a rising plane of nutrition in the

run up to breeding. Poor body condition is one of the most common reasons for reduced fertility and rams will tend to lose some condition while working.

The AHDB ram MOT is a great starting point to check rams over with the 5 Ts: toes, teeth, testicles, tone and treat. You will definitely weed out the most dodgy rams this way; for more info you can check with your vet or check out the AHDB ram MOT info.

With all this sorted you are half-way there. Whilst there are never any guarantees, a full veterinary breeding soundness examination offers peace of mind that rams are capable of doing the job. This includes:

- General health check and physical examination.
- Detailed assessment of reproductive organs, including scrotal circumference.
- Collection of semen sample and assessment of volume, density, motility and individual sperm characteristics.



## Numbers of rams:

The number of rams is very important to achieve the best pregnancy rates. The ratio of rams to ewes should be well considered and is only correct if all tups are fully fit and fertile. Below shows a guide on how many tups to ewes you should have for each situation. It is worth noting that if you are thinking of synchronising your ewes for early lambing the first thing you need to look at is ram numbers.

- 1:40 is fine if all rams are firing on all cylinders.
- 1:30 if teasers are being used for a tighter lambing period, teasers can be at a rate of 1:100
- 1:10 - Sponging for synchronisation
- 1:5 - Sponging + PMSG for early lambing
- 1:25 - Rams serving ewes that have had Regulin implant
- 1:50 - If rams and ewes have had Regulin implant

## Teasers:

Teasers can really help group lambing tightly together at the start of the season, but this will only work if all the guidelines are followed. Teasers must meet all the same standards as the rams apart from being able to release any sperm and ewes must have total separation (sight, sound and smell) from any males for several weeks prior to tugging for the effects to fully work.

**Because temporary factors can be just as important as permanent ones you cannot rely on rams purely on the basis of previous seasons' success. We recommend testing all rams on an annual basis.**

**Can you afford to take the risk? Discuss this with your vet before time ticks away.**



# Beef Parasites

by Luke Williams BVetMed MRCVS



**The presence of lung worm, gastrointestinal round worm and liver fluke are the leading cause of production losses for the cattle industry. The parasites cause a reduction in feed intake and utilisation of nutrients, animals infected may show signs of diarrhoea, respiratory disease, ill thrift and death.**

## Lung Worm

**Life-cycle:** Cattle are infected with lung worm by ingesting *Dictyocaulus viviparus* larvae from pasture. Larvae pass through the animals gut and travel to the lungs, where they mature into adults, this process takes around 3 weeks. Once mature females start laying eggs, these eggs hatch producing young larvae that travel up the windpipe, are swallowed and pass through the gastrointestinal tract and are passed out in the faeces, infecting the pasture and increasing the parasite burden on the pasture. This cycle takes around 4 weeks to complete; one week for the larvae to mature on pasture and three weeks for larvae to mature into adults in the animal.

**Prevention and Treatment:** Cattle will develop natural immunity to lung worm, usually taking 1-2 month to develop. Continued exposure is needed to maintain immunity. Dairy calves and autumn born suckler calves are very susceptible to infection, therefore vaccination is recommended prior to turn out to develop immunity. Clinical signs of lungworm infection include respiratory signs, panting and harsh persistent cough. Severe infections may result in difficulty breathing and death. Lungworm infection should be considered when calves are showing signs of respiratory disease whilst at pasture. Diagnosis is through faecal testing, however negative results are possible in acute infections. Lungworm can be treated with most wormers used for gut worms in cattle.

## Gastrointestinal Worms

**Life-cycle:** The most common gastrointestinal parasites in the UK are *Ostertagia ostertagi* (Stomach worm) and *Cooperia oncophora* (Intestinal worm). The lifecycles are similar to that of lungworm but *Ostertagia* has the ability to arrest its development during winter and hibernate within the stomach wall. Towards the end of winter it continues to develop into adults worms. This can happen in any cattle, however young cattle particularly are at risk if they have been exposed to large numbers of arrested larvae in the autumn. This can cause severe weight loss and diarrhoea or death, this disease process is known as type II Ostertagiosis.

**Prevention and Treatment:** Type I Ostertagiosis is usually seen during late summer to early autumn and is caused by the ingestion of large number of infective larvae that mature into adult worms. Adult cattle are not as susceptible to disease as calves or yearlings if they have developed immunity from past exposure. Signs of disease are loss of appetite and watery green diarrhoea which may affect a large proportion of animals within a group in a short amount of time. Growing cattle can lose up to 10% body weight and have extended periods to reach slaughter weights, death is uncommon. Type I Ostertagiosis is best controlled by pasture managements. Grazing young cattle on pasture that has been grazed by young untreated cattle in the last 12 months poses the highest risk of infection, whereas new pastures or pasture grazed by adult cattle pose a lower risk. Worming treatment should be aimed at youngstock in their first and second grazing seasons, they can be treated early in the grazing season to prevent contamination of the pasture later in the year.

Type II Ostertagiosis is usually seen in late winter to spring depending on when the arrested larvae emerge. As the arrested larvae emerge together acute onset profuse diarrhoea is usually

seen. Type II Ostertagiosis has a poor treatment response to worming treatment. The best way to prevent disease is to treat with preventative routine worming treatment at housing during autumn/winter and minimising the exposure of youngstock to large numbers of arrested larvae late in the grazing season.

## Liver fluke

**Life-cycle:** Liver fluke is caused by the parasite *Fasciola hepatica*, it has a slightly different life cycle compared to that of lung and gut worms. Liver fluke requires the mud snail to complete its life cycle therefore is more abundant in wet marshy areas. Adult fluke live in the bile ducts of the liver, from here they lay eggs that pass into the gastrointestinal tract to be passed out in faeces. The eggs develop into the next stage that infects the mud snail. After 6 weeks of development in the snail the young fluke emerge from the snail on to pasture to be eaten by cattle. Once ingested by grazing cattle the young fluke migrate to the liver, which can cause a considerable amount of tissue damage. The mature fluke emerge into the bile duct and start producing eggs. Adult fluke can live within the liver for 1-2 years if not treated with an effective flukicide.

Suckler cows most commonly present with chronic weight loss. Spring calving cows are usually most severely affected due to the high metabolic demands of late pregnancy and marginal winter rations. Cows may produce weak calves and have lower milk yields, causing higher perinatal losses.

Fattening cattle will most commonly show signs of poor weight gains, severe infestations can lead to severe weight loss, brisket oedema and bottle jaw. UK slaughterhouses are reporting increasing numbers of liver condemnations due to fluke damage in 12 to 18 month-old fattening cattle where reduced liveweight gains were not suspected by producers due to low-moderate infestation levels.

Diagnosis of liver fluke can be from faecal samples but the sensitivity of faecal egg counts for liver fluke in cattle is 50%, counts may also be negative if animals are recently infected. There is also a blood test to check for liver fluke, however this may indicate prior exposure as well as an active infection.

**Prevention and Treatment:** Using flukicide as a preventative control measure should be discussed with your vet and be part of your herd health plan. There are a number of flukicide treatments available to use depending on which stage of the lifecycle is to be targeted. Treatment should be considered depending on the areas grazed and risk of the given year. In high risk areas, strategic treatments with flukicide is the most appropriate control measure. Winter housed cattle can be treated at housing with a single dose of an appropriate flukicide in accordance with the herd health plan. All purchased cattle should be treated with a flukicide before entering the herd.

The recovery of chronically infected cattle is slow following treatment with a flukicide. Improved nutrition of affected cattle is essential to restore body condition and production. Treated cattle should be moved to clean pastures wherever possible.

**With the ever increasing uncertainty of beef prices in the UK, producers should ensure that production losses are kept to a minimum to maximise profits. The presence of parasites within a herd can cause considerable production losses, so control measures should be in place to ensure that maximum efficiency is achieved.**

**Do contact your local Westpoint practice if you would like advice on parasite prevention and treatment.**

# The advantages of post-mortem examination

by Ricardo Borralheiro MSc MRCVS

The health status of a farm is very important for economic and welfare reasons. By knowing the issues of your farm, you can work with your vet to establish preventative measures (with a Herd Health Plan) and reduce losses through mortality, abortion and the use of antibiotics.

Farm animal post-mortem examinations (PME) are not used often enough, but they are a very helpful tool to investigate outbreaks of disease. Without the limitations of dealing with a living animal, with a PME we can thoroughly search for changes associated with disease and take a different array of samples to try to reach a diagnosis. Many diseases have similar signs of illness, so often a well performed PME with appropriate samples taken is the only way to identify which disease we are dealing with. This can give us very valuable information, not just about the animal that died, but about the remaining members of the herd as well. It can also provide us with the information whether a single death is the first causality of a major outbreak or just one-off case.

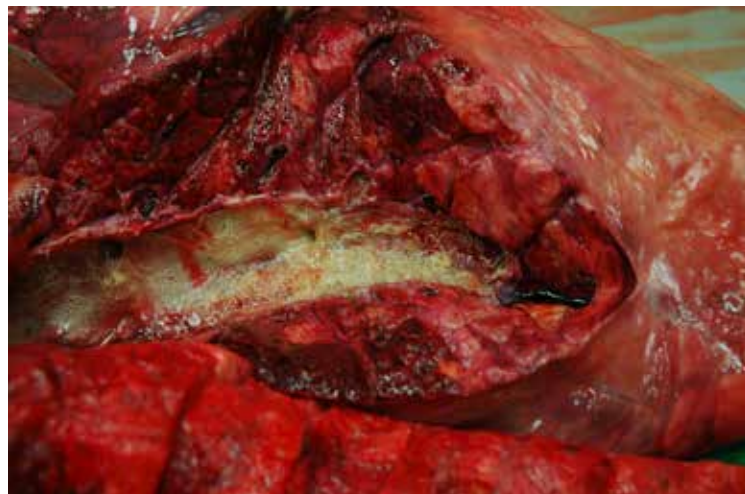
Some herd conditions that can heavily affect the profitability of your farm, such as certain trace element deficiencies, worm infestation and viral/bacterial infection, can be identified straight away with a PME on farm. For example, white muscle disease (selenium deficiency), with clear patterns of white coloration in the muscle, can be identified almost immediately. Worm infestation, with the presence of high number of adult worms in the gut is another example. The causative agents of pneumonia can often be diagnosed based on lesion patterns in the lungs. Appropriate samples taken on PME can confirm and support any diagnosis made.

A good post-mortem diagnosis is based on the presence of specific lesions that are compatible with a good clinical history. Bear in mind that a fresh carcass will lead to more reliable findings, with putrefaction and autolysis in older carcasses greatly deteriorating the tissues and hiding signs of disease. Some diseases and conditions have non-specific lesions and can be difficult to fully diagnose on PME, such as allergy, post vaccine reaction, stroke, some kinds of poisoning and heart attack.



Black leg has characteristic finds on post mortem

A PME can benefit both farmer and veterinary surgeon by providing information specific to that farm. Together, they can work on measures to prevent this problem in the future, as well as developing specific treatment protocols. For the vet, it is an excellent tool to expand their knowledge about that disease and your farm, and eventually review and improve some treatment procedures. It is the perfect way to identify things that could have been done differently for a better outcome.



Lungworm are clearly visible here

This PME service can be provided by your usual veterinary practice or your local APHA Veterinary Inspection Centre. Please call your local Westpoint practice for further information.

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## Westpoint Farm Vets

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**King's Lynn** 30 Gayton Road, Grimston, Norfolk, PE32 1BG | 01485 609031

**Louth** 2 Furze Hill Cottages, Bilsby, Alford, Lincolnshire, LN13 9QS | 01485 609031

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