westpoint farm vets

Central Newsletter | Spring 2020

Spring News

Daventry

We look forward to welcoming **Georgina Barnhurst** to our team in March. Gina graduated from Bristol Vet School in 2018 and has been working in farm practice in Worcestershire. She is interested in all aspects of farm animal practice, particularly responsible use of wormers in sheep and tackling BVD and Johne's disease in cattle. She also enjoys all types of surgery. Originally from Northamptonshire, Gina joins us at Westpoint Daventry to be closer to her family. Outside work, Gina can be found running, cycling and attempting to grow vegetables.

A big thank you to all of our farmers who attended the **Christmas Quiz** and generously donated prizes for the raffle, we raised £310 which was donated to the Farming Community Network (FCN), who were grateful recipients.

What do you do with the calf born through assisted delivery which just doesn't get going, takes a breath and then fades? The team would like all cattle farms to consider investing in a **calf resuscitator** for these eventualities, allowing air to be delivered to a newborn calf in a way that does not put humans at risk of contracting disease! These can be purchased through FarmSupplies for £120 +VAT, call Jo on 07841 917171.

Keep an eye out for upcoming meetings in your emails – we will be starting a **Flock Club** in 2020 and we have lots of other exciting topics to cover.

Leighton Buzzard

As you may know, Tonia is on maternity leave and her practice principal duties are in the very capable hands of Alex Rowley. Last call for **TB Advisory Service** visits! Any cattle farmers in the Edge Area are eligible for a free TBAS visit and should take this opportunity soon as the initiative ends in June. The SAC **BVD Stamp It Out** scheme is still running, providing free BVD testing for farms. Anyone involved already should look out for the next final cluster meeting - farmers yet to enrol can still do so, please ring the practice for more info.

Ashbourne

We're very proud of Sarah Tomlinson who was named **Dairy Vet of the Year** at the Cream Awards. The award recognises a vet for going the extra mile in helping to create a more positive, forward-thinking dairy industry. In addition to her work as a farm vet, Sarah's role as Technical Director of TBAS involves her overseeing and delivering training for new advisors, chairing technical board meetings and delivering farmer meetings across the country. She also provides bespoke TB advice to farmers in High Risk and Edge Areas of England. Sarah's knowledge, but by her compassion and understanding for those suffering a TB breakdown.

On 17th February, we held our annual lambing meeting; this year focusing on '**Diseases of Lambing**', kindly sponsored by MSD. Mel Bexon ran the meeting and covered an array of topics, from Twin Lamb Disease through to Watery Mouth. There were 25 farmers in attendance, with some healthy discussion and questions regarding responsible use of antibiotics towards the end of the evening. We are pleased that we have such enthusiastic sheep farmers that are keen to work with us!

Look out for details of our **Dairy Transition** meeting at the end of March.

Seasonal advice for alpaca and llama clients

We are in a position to import and prescribe injectable preparations of Vitamin D to ensure adequate levels in camelids over winter. Vitamin D is essential for growth plate mineralisation and bone health, and as it is absorbed from the sun, camelids (who have very few exposed areas to absorb it through the skin) may struggle to maintain adequate levels in the winter. This is particularly important in late-born and growing cria. Any camelid owners wishing to discuss over-winter Vitamin D supplementation should speak to their local practice for advice.

It will also soon be time to think about unpacking preparations, and whether collection and processing of plasma is right for your herd. Westpoint offer a full plasma collection and processing service, ensuring you are properly stocked and prepared in the unfortunate event of failure of passive transfer of immunity in cria.

Please feel free to get in touch for more details.

The 4 P's of Lambing: Preparation, Planning, Prevention, Performance.

by Kaisa Velstrom BVM&S MRCVS

Lambing season is one of the busiest times of year for any sheep farmer, but it can quickly become overwhelming and tiring. Good preparation and planning will help to manage it successfully.

Make sure you have all the necessary equipment and supplies and that your system is fit for handling the expected numbers. It is important to have good hygiene in the lambing environment for both indoor and outdoor systems with the appropriate stocking densities. Do your best to provide lie-back areas and lambing pens that are dry, draft-free and cleanly bedded with proper cleansing and disinfection between occupants.

When lambing assistance is required, clean gloves should be used for all ewes and hands regularly washed. Navels should be fully immersed in a 10% iodine solution as promptly as possible after birth. Follow maximum hygiene during all husbandry procedures, and suitably clean and disinfect the equipment between individual animals.

To reduce the use of prophylactic antibiotics on lambs, it is important to provide adequate nutrition to your ewes in the last six weeks of pregnancy. Group them according to scanning results and their body condition score. This will improve lamb survival rates, give better birth weights and maximise colostrum production. Also, it has been shown to improve the maternal bond with the lamb. Your vet can help to assess their energy and protein status 4-6 weeks pre-lambing by taking blood samples.

The volume, quality and timing of colostrum is essential. Lambs should receive 50ml/kg in the first 2 hours following birth and a total of 200-250 ml/kg birth weight within first 18 hours in mild weather. 50% more is needed in wet and windy conditions. In case of inadequate supply, quality or volume of colostrum, one can try to substitute with another ewe's colostrum. Pooled goat colostrum from an CAE accredited herd can also be used as a second choice. Pooled cow colostrum from a Johne's free herd can be used but 30% more is needed to make up the energy. Commercial substitutes are also available. When storing colostrum, it is best to use zip lock bags for easy defrosting. Defrosting should be done gently until reaching 39°C.

When the colostrum period is well managed the lambs will better be able to cope with a few bugs without the need for antibiotic treatments, this helps establish a healthy population in their gut. Colostrum-deprived lambs are usually not able to control the multiplication of E.coli. In some circumstances, where it is not possible to improve the management quickly enough, the use of oral antibiotics might become necessary. It is then important to aim to use less every year.

Try to step away from blanket treatment of all lambs at birth. Start with small changes first by trying to keep up to 10% or more without treatment at the beginning of your lambing season. Then, from there on, reassess and monitor. Antibiotics against watery mouth should be targeted towards high risk lambs. These would be triplet or low birth weight lambs that are born later in lambing season with more challenging environmental conditions, or into group with recent clinical cases or lambs born to thin and/ or poorly fed ewes.

Try to set targets for reducing lamb losses. Good records are essential to benchmark performance and to help you identify any potential problem areas. You should be aiming for less than 15% lamb losses, but top performing flocks are achieving closer to 10%. Good flock health planning together with your vet is essential.

If you need advice on lambing or are interested in joining one of our Flock Health Clubs then please contact your nearest Westpoint practice.

Getting the environment right – managing youngstock during the winter

by Tim Potter BVetMed PhD MRCVS, Senior Clinical Director

The winter period presents several challenges for calf rearing and most issues that we see as vets can be traced back to problems with the environment and management. Diseases such as pneumonia and scours are caused in part by a poor environment; and any control measures for these diseases start by ensuring sheds are clean, well ventilated and not overcrowded.

There are a number of different housing systems available for calves, but whichever you choose it is important to consider the important factors that will affect the environment around the calf; ventilation, temperature, humidity and bedding.

In the housed environment, a constant supply of fresh air is essential in preventing respiratory and other diseases together with improving production. Good ventilation removes stale, humid air, which helps ensure that viruses and bacteria cannot survive for long outside the animal. Even in cold weather a good supply of fresh air is essential; but always make sure the airflow is above the level of calves, as animals kept in draughts will not perform because energy will be diverted from growth into simply maintaining their body temperature. Watch out for gaps under doors and gates as they will permit draughts right at the level calves lie at. If calves are housed in an exposed or tall building, consider making lower covered areas where they can keep warm.

As the environmental temperature drops it is not unusual for producers to see reduced growth rates as calves will burn extra energy to keep warm. The body temperature can be affected by environmental factors such as air temperature, radiant temperature, air speed and relative humidity. The lower critical temperature (LCT) is the temperature below which an animal requires additional energy to keep warm. In the first three weeks of life the LCT is between 10 and 15°C, as the calf grows its ability to cope with the cold improves and the LCT drops, calves over 3 weeks of age have a lower critical temperature of around 6°C. During the colder months it is possible to maintain growth rates by increasing the amount of feed the calves are receiving (either by increasing the volume they receive or for those animals on milk replacer increasing the concentration). There is obviously a cost associated with this, but it is recouped by the increased growth rates and also the reduced incidence of disease as well-fed animals have a better immune function.

For young calves, calf jackets are also a very useful tool for providing protection from the cold. Consider using jackets for calves under the age of 3 weeks when temperatures fall below 15°C. The calf must be dry before you put a jacket on to it and it is important to always wash jackets between calves to avoid transmission of diseases such as scour. The common question we get asked is when is best to take the jacket off? I always advise leaving the jacket on until the calf reaches weaning or has outgrown it. When it is time to take the jacket off always do this in the morning when the environmental temperature is going to be its highest, this allows the calf to adjust before the temperature begins to fall overnight.

High levels of humidity allow pathogens to persist in the environment and spread from calf to calf. Good ventilation is important to reducing humidity, but humidity can be further reduced by ensuring good drainage and minimising standing water in the environment. The preparation of milk feeds results in a large amount of liquid in the environment, so where possible preparation and cleaning should occur away from where the calves are housed. Remember adding water to the environment will also reduce the temperature as energy is used to drive evaporation.

It is important to provide enough clean bedding to reduce contact between the calf and soiled straw. Calves like to nest, and it is important they have sufficient straw to keep them warm and minimise stress. Always aim that there is enough fresh straw in the beds so that when a calf is lying down its legs are covered.

The winter period can often present a challenge for youngstock rearing with many farms experiencing increased problems with diseases such as pneumonia and scours. Taking steps to protect calves from the cold and ensuring that they are warm and dry will reduce the risk of disease and also help to maintain the growth rates which are vital for their long-term performance.

Do contact your local Westpoint practice if you would like advice on youngstock housing and management.

Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR)

by Charlotte Hockings BVetMed MRCVS

IBR is a disease that is often mentioned in passing but not often in much detail, here is a short piece to lift the lid on IBR.

Infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) is a viral infection that can affect cattle at any age. The virus that causes it is a bovine herpes virus (BHV-1) and, as with human herpes viruses, once an animal is infected, they will always have the virus. This is known as latency. Once the initial infection is over the virus retreats to the nerve cells in the face. When the animal goes through a period of stress, eg calving or weaning, the virus can start replicating and cause disease again. Around 40% of farms in the UK have IBR on farm.

IBR is highly contagious and is spread from cow to cow via contact with secretions, through the air and uncommonly by sexual transmission. The most common form of the disease is the respiratory form, but it also has a reproductive form.

Clinical signs vary and often occur 2-3 weeks after a stressful event. When the disease is mild, signs are non-specific and can be confused with other causes of pneumonia. More severe signs include fever, thick discoloured nasal discharge, ocular discharge, coughing, panting, foul breath (halitosis) from pus in the back of the throat and windpipe, decreased appetite, severe milk drop, abortion and, occasionally, death.

Outbreaks on naïve farms can have morbidity (loss of production) of up to 100% in the group but rarely cause mortality (around 2%).

As IBR is a virus, treatment is focused on supportive therapy with anti-inflammatories and nutritional support through periods of inappetence. Antibiotics are indicated if a secondary bacterial pneumonia has infected the lungs.

Diagnosis of IBR in acute cases detects the virus itself from swabs of the back of the nose or the eyes. To detect latently infected animals blood samples are taken for antibodies.

Management of IBR on farm is best done through vaccination. There are a number of vaccines available and it is best to vaccinate animals when the protection from the dam's antibodies wanes. This usually occurs from four to six months of age.

The vaccines are either intranasal or intramuscular and usually cover other infectious causes of pneumonia. Vaccination strategies are important as full protection is usually achieved up to 3 weeks after injection. Vaccines should therefore be given at least 3 weeks before a period of stress, eg weaning. In the face of an outbreak or widespread latent IBR on farm, an intra-nasal vaccine can be given from 2 weeks of age.

Marker vaccines are available which differentiate vaccinated animals from those infected naturally. Annual vaccination of all animals in the herd can be a useful part of IBR management, however on farms with little to no exposure, biosecurity and only buying in from accredited herds is advisable. Testing of all incoming animals will also help to prevent widespread outbreaks in naïve herds.

In summary, IBR is a disease that is often overlooked but can make a big impact on productivity. Westpoint Farm Vets can advise on vaccination, biosecurity and how to prevent infection entering your herd. We are looking to recruit 100 dairy or beef farms which are currently unvaccinated for IBR. We will carry out free blood and bulk milk samples then discuss the results with you and give recommendations. This project is kindly sponsored by MSD Animal Health.

Westpoint Farm Vets

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