



MARCHES VETS FARM ANIMAL NEWSLETTER – APRIL 2016

Effects of a late spring

Grass growth has been slow over the last month and this will have been affecting ewes and lambs. If ewes are not been milking well, lambs will start grazing earlier, increasing the risks of coccidiosis and nematodirus. There's also an increased risk of mastitis in the ewes. Supplementary feeding of ewes should continue until sward height is at least 4cm, and preferably 5cm for ewes with twins. And if cold conditions continue, creep feeding lambs may be the only way to keep them growing and to minimise longterm effects on the ewes.

Nematodirus

The forecast on the SCOPS website (www.scops.org.uk) shows that temperatures have not been high enough to encourage a mass hatch of eggs yet. However, local conditions will vary, and we identified Nematodirus worms in month old lambs in mid March. In this case, the lambs also had coccidiosis (despite having recently been treated) and several lambs died suddenly over a 24 hour period. If young lambs over 3 weeks old start to scour and are grazing ground that had ewes and young lambs on it last spring, nematodirus is likely and they are best wormed straightaway. A white drench (1-BZ wormer) is recommended and it's a good idea to follow this up with a worm egg count 10 days later to ensure treatment has been fully effective. **No wormers have any persistent action against nematodirus**, so lambs may need treating again 2 to 3 weeks later.

The risk of coccidiosis will vary from farm to farm – but generally, the longer lambs were kept inside post lambing, the greater the risk of coccidiosis. Other factors are young lambs on ground that has already been grazed by lambs this spring and swards with very little cover. **If you need to worm your lambs, don't do the ewes, too.** Ewes play almost no part in the nematodirus life cycle and worming ewes selects for resistant worms much more quickly than worming lambs. The exceptions are ewe lambs with lambs at foot and very thin ewes.

Are your dogs micro-chipped yet?

Legislation requiring all dogs to be micro-chipped came into force on 6th April 2016. So if your dogs have not yet been chipped, contact the practice.

Tapeworms in Dogs and Sheep

Another dog issue that has recently come to our attention is that of lamb carcasses being rejected at the abattoir due to infection with the larval stage of a dog tapeworm. The stage in the sheep is called *Cysticercus ovis* or *C.ovis* and it appears as small creamy white cysts in the heart, diaphragm or throughout the muscles. One farmer has had over 20 store lambs rejected – not only do you not get paid for the lambs, but you are charged for disposal of the carcasses. Another dog tapeworm causes lesions in the livers of sheep. The stage in the sheep is called *Cysticercus tenuicollis* or *C.tenuicollis* and this infection results in about 10% of lamb livers in the UK being discarded as waste – they are not even fit for pet-food. Neither of these infections can be treated in the sheep so control depends upon

- not allowing dogs to scavenge sheep carcasses or to eat raw sheep meat or offal
- worming dogs every month with a product effective against tapeworms, (one that contains praziquantel). Every 3 months, dogs should be wormed against roundworms as well as tapeworms.

A simple way to achieve this is to worm with Droncit every month and Drontal every third month. **For a limited time, we are offering 2 months supply of free Droncit tablets when you buy Drontal tablets for your farm dogs.**

Hypomagnesaemia or staggers is often associated with cows or ewes grazing rapidly growing spring grass. However, cows or ewes that are short of energy in their diet are also at high risk. This might apply to animals kept inside on poor quality forage, or turned out to very little grass, so be sure to provide extra magnesium.

Clostridial vaccination for young cattle

We would advise that all calves and young cattle are vaccinated against clostridial diseases. Perhaps the most familiar clostridial disease in cattle is Blackleg, but there are many types of clostridial disease, all of which usually result in death. Calves and unvaccinated young cattle will need two doses of vaccine (eg Bravoxin 10) four weeks apart, whilst yearlings that had a primary course as a calf will just need a booster prior to turnout.

BVD vaccination

Remember to vaccinate heifers before they go to the bull for the first time. There are two types of vaccine – a live vaccine that only requires a single dose, and inactivated vaccines that requires 2 doses 3 weeks apart. However, in both cases, the first dose of vaccine should be given at least 4 weeks before mating. Cows require an annual booster each year, and the best time to give this is after calving and before they go back to the bull.

How much water do sheep at grass need?

Of course, the answer is that it depends on -

- the **weather** and how much water they are ingesting with the grass
- the **quality of the pasture** – dry stemmy grass will increase the water requirement
- the **demands on the animal** – a ewe with lambs needs more water than a dry sheep, a scouring lamb will require more water because it is losing water in faeces

The other factor that has a major effect is **what other feed the sheep are eating**. If sheep are being fed **concentrates, this will always increase their requirement for water**.

Sheep are fussy about what they will drink, so it's important that they are offered fresh water –you should be happy to drink it yourself! Algal growth in water troughs makes the water less attractive and they are likely to drink less than they need. The initial consequence of inadequate water intake is that the animal's feed intake will fall, so ewes will produce less milk and lamb growth rates will decrease. There will be an **increased risk of mastitis** and of conditions such as hypomagnesaemia. Weaned male lambs are at risk of urolithiasis (formation of crystals in the urine) if they are on high levels of concentrates.

General guidelines on water provision are as follows:

- ensure **water is easily accessible** to all stock at all times – this may mean putting blocks in front of troughs for lambs to drink
- **keep water troughs clean**
- allow **sufficient trough space** that 5% of the group could drink together at any one time
- ensure **flow rates** are such that water is **always** available,
- when lambs are on ad lib creep, make sure there is a water source close by

Cattle and pigs will usually 'tell you' if they don't have enough water – by congregating around the trough and often damaging it in their efforts to get more water. But sheep generally don't do this, so you may not be aware that there's a problem.

Do you know what dlwg your growing cattle achieve at grass?

If not, remember to weigh them prior to turnout to find out.