

## MARCHES VETS FARM ANIMAL NEWSLETTER – JUNE 2016

### Grassland meeting

Those who came to the meeting with Charlie Morgan at Lower Hope Farms enjoyed a couple of hours in glorious sunshine in the beautiful parkland surroundings. We looked at the soils and grass in 3 fields and discussed the factors that might be adversely affecting grass yield and quality and how best to rectify these. For those who missed the meeting, but are interested in improving performance from grass – don't worry – we didn't get through all of the planned programme for yesterday, so are already planning **another farm meeting for mid July**. At the next meeting we will focus more on the animals at grass and the things that affect animal performance – **grass quality, worms and trace elements**. We'll let you know the date and venue shortly.

### Worms

The biology of the worm parasites affecting sheep and cattle means that the **worm challenge** on pasture where young non-immune stock are grazing will be building up now. At low temperatures, worm eggs that are passed out in faeces can take several months to develop into infective larvae, but when temperatures are above 20°C this period can be reduced to less than a week. This means that there's a 'concertina' effect with eggs that have been deposited on the pasture during the spring all developing into infective larvae at about the same time. If lambs stay on these dirty pastures, they will be continually challenged, and their performance will be adversely affected, however often they are wormed. So, weaning lambs onto pasture that hasn't had ewes and lambs on for the first part of the season makes a massive difference to how they will grow on. A similar situation applies with artificially reared calves. Worm challenge builds up over the first part of the season, so it's best to move calves in July onto ground that hasn't had young cattle that year. Suckler calves are different for two reasons – firstly because the cows act as 'hoovers', taking up a lot of the worm larvae and secondly because suckler calves depend largely on their mother's milk, so graze much less.

### Wormer resistance

Most sheep farms will have wormer resistance. Although this is most commonly to the white drenches (1-BZ) wormers, resistance to the yellow (2-LV) drenches and the clear drenches (3-ML) is now very common. If a wormer is only 75% effective, ie it leaves 25% of the worms behind, you won't be able to tell this just by how the lambs look. They are still likely to show an improvement after worming because you've got rid of 75% of the worms. Picking up resistance early is beneficial in that it will allow you to plan how to use the different wormers in a more targeted way, and so maintain their efficacy for longer. It's easy to do a simple check by collecting samples for a worm egg count after worming (called a **drench check test**). The timing of sampling post worming is as follows:

- 10 to 14 days for a white drench (1-BZ)
- 7 days for a yellow drench (2-LV)
- 14 days for a clear drench (3-ML)

As yet, there have been no reports of resistance to the **group 4 and 5 wormers** in the UK. It's a good idea to use one of these groups in lambs in mid summer as it will be highly effective at a time when worm challenge is the greatest. These products – the group 4 wormer is Zolvix, and the group 5 is Startect – are still vet only products. Under-dosing and over use of wormers are two of the main drivers for resistance, so it's really important that these products are used carefully.

## Weaning lambs

Weaning early (10 to 12 weeks) is likely to be beneficial if you're short of grass or ewes are in poor condition. And resist the temptation to leave poorer lambs with the ewes for longer. If lambs aren't doing well on their mothers, that usually means the ewes haven't been milking very well. Recent studies have shown that poorer lambs will improve if weaned early, providing they are given high quality grass with a low worm challenge. Conversely, lambs that are growing well and are close to finished are better left with the ewes to avoid a weaning check.

## Thin Ewes

If you have any underlying disease problems in your flock, such as Ovine Pulmonary Adenomatosis or Johnes disease, these often become apparent at this time of year as ewes that have lost condition during lactation fail to pick up. **Investigating thin ewes** or increased ewe mortality is worthwhile to help minimise the impact of these diseases

## Trace elements

**Cobalt** is the most important trace element affecting growth rates in lambs and calves. And one of the problems with cobalt is that ruminants have minimal stores, so need a **regular supply**. Conversely, other trace elements, such as copper and selenium are stored in the body, and if you give them too often, toxicity can result (especially copper, which should only be given if a need for extra copper has been identified). Many lambs will benefit from cobalt supplementation, and the best way to give the supplement will vary from farm to farm depending on how long the lambs are likely to be on farm, how often they are handled etc. We can supply cobalt sulphate powder, a cobalt and selenium drench or cobalt, selenium and iodine boluses.

## Bull fertility

Many of you will have the bulls out with the cows by now. If you notice that more cows are returning than you might expect, it's better to act straightaway and get the bull checked, than to wait until you get disappointing results at PD'ing. We can use a blood test to detect pregnancy from 28 days gestation, so this can be helpful to check early whether or not a bull is getting cows in calf.

## Health Plan and Annual Medicine Reviews

It is a legal requirement for us to visit farms at least annually to review animal health and performance and the medicines that you use routinely on the farm. It is also now a requirement of FABBL that we complete an annual medicines review for all prescription medicines. As this time of year is generally a quieter time, we will start to contact those of you whose farms we haven't visited in the last 12 months to arrange a visit. Our experience is that these visits are generally very positive. Money spent on vet time is generally much better spent on looking at ways of preventing disease than on treating sick animals.

## Other topical issues:

- **fly control** for both cattle and sheep.
- **clostridial disease prevention** for both cattle and sheep
  - 2 doses of Ovivac P Plus 4 to 6 weeks apart for lambs
  - 2 doses of Bravoxin 10 or Covexin 8 for 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> season grazing cattle
- **sheep scab**. We have recently seen a couple of cases noticed at shearing. If your shearers notice that there's a problem, bring us some wool and scab material so we can identify whether the cause is scab or lice and advise you accordingly