

MARCHES VETERINARY GROUP

FARM ANIMAL NEWSLETTER – MAY 2017



Vaccinating replacement ewes against abortion

If you already have your replacement ewes on farm, consider vaccinating them earlier. Abortion vaccines shouldn't be given within 4 weeks of tupping, but any time before this is fine. MSD are offering a **5% discount on Toxovax** ordered before the beginning of July, and we will pass on this discount for those who order the vaccine early. But remember that Toxovax has a short shelf life, so only order it if you have the sheep there ready to vaccinate.

Cobalt in lambs

Lambs start to need more cobalt as they change from a predominantly milk diet to grass. All ruminants require cobalt in their diets for the synthesis of vitamin B12, which is essential for energy metabolism and the production of red blood cells. Cobalt deficiency in lambs causes reduced appetite and illthrift. If the deficiency is severe, lambs start to fade away, become extremely weak and die.

Ruminants are only able to store small amounts of vitamin B12, so cobalt needs to be regularly available. This makes supplementation more difficult than with some of the other trace elements where stores are greater. If extra cobalt is given by drench, this should ideally be done every week, although every 2 to 3 week will usually suffice. Rumen boluses release a small amount every day but our experiences to date have shown that they are not always effective in preventing cobalt deficiency in lambs. Some boluses are probably better than others, but there's an inherent difficulty in producing boluses that are small enough to put in a lamb but big enough to stay in the rumen as the lambs grow. Injecting with vitamin B12 is another option, but once again, this needs to be done every few weeks and repeatedly injecting fat lambs risks damaging the carcass.

A New Zealand product called **Smartshot B12** provides up to 6 months supply of vitamin B12 from a single injection. Smartshot is now available in the UK and we can source it if we apply for a special license. We feel that Smartshot B12 might be useful for longer keep lambs, especially when it's difficult to gather lambs on a regular basis. The smallest pack size is 500ml, with young lambs requiring 1ml – so the product is only suitable for larger farms. The cost will be just over £1 per lamb. Please contact the practice if you are interested in trying this. If lambs aren't treated until weaning time, the dose increases to 2ml per lamb.

Schmallenberg Virus (SBV)

Due to the resurgence of **Schmallenberg virus** during the recent lambing and calving season, some of you have enquired about the availability of SBV vaccine.

Disappointingly, there is unlikely to be any vaccine available until July. The vaccine requires a 2 dose course in cattle, with 3 weeks between doses. The course needs to be completed before animals go to the bull, so vaccine is unlikely to be available in time to be used by spring calving herds.

Sheep only require a single dose of SBV vaccine given at least 14 days before going to the tup.

The latest Bluetongue situation

BTV8 has now reached northern France. The recent cases continue to be picked up at pre-movement testing, rather than because animals have been showing signs of disease. However, even if there has been no actual disease, positive test results indicate that the infection is still circulating, and therefore that there may be a risk to cattle and sheep in the UK again this summer. Bluetongue virus is spread by midges. Treating animals with insecticides may help to reduce the risk of disease, but vaccination is the only sure way of protecting susceptible stock. Bluetongue vaccine is currently available. Both cattle and sheep require 2 doses 3 weeks apart.

Maximising conception rates in suckler herds

Cows that have had difficult calvings or retained cleansings are less likely to get back in calf than those that calved and cleansed normally. A vet examination of problem cows can help to identify those that are still 'dirty' so they can be treated to increase their chances of conception. This should be done at least a few weeks before the bull goes in. **Breeding bulls should be checked over now** – body condition, feet and testicles. We recommend **semen testing** any unproven bulls, or any older bulls if there have been any concerns about their performance last year, or if any testicular abnormalities (eg uneven or small testicles) are detected.

Worming lambs

Lambs that are grazing ground that had lambs on it last year may still be at risk of disease due to nematodirus. No wormers have any persistency against nematodirus, so lambs that have already been treated may need drenching again. Although a white drench (1-BZ) is recommended for specifically targeting nematodirus, it may not be the most appropriate choice once other worm species (that might be resistant to white drenches) are also present. Recent worm egg counting results have shown that other species of worms are now quite prevalent, so a group 2-LV or 3-ML wormer is recommended for treating lambs over the next month (see <http://www.scops.org.uk/content/Know-Your-Anthelmintics> for more information on products and wormer groups). If your lambs look well, don't just treat them, but have an egg count done to see if they really need doing.

Booking visits

Just a reminder to please telephone the practice early in the day if you would like animals to be seen that day. This enables us to plan our rounds more efficiently. Also, if you think an animal needs to be seen, please ask for a visit when you phone rather than asking to discuss the case with a vet first. Often the vets are too busy to phone you back straightaway and we sometimes end up with a delay in seeing sick animals because a visit wasn't requested at the outset. If you have a non urgent query, please consider emailing it to farm@marchesvets.co.uk rather than phoning.