**MARCHES VETS**
**FARM ANIMAL NEWSLETTER – SEPTEMBER 2016**

## Pre-tupping ewe management

The most important thing to have right for a successful lambing next year is **ewe body condition.** The target body condition score (BCS) for lowland ewes at tupping is 3 to 3.5. This graph shows the numbers of lambs born per 100 Welsh Mule ewes according to their BCS at tupping.

| BCS at tupping | 2 | 2.5 | 3 | 3.5 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lambs born per 100 ewes | 149 | 166 | 178 | 194 | 192 |

You can see that fat ewes still generally produce a lot of lambs, being too lean is much more likely to result in a poor scanning. If you have a group of thin ewes and you have plenty of grass, supplementing them with whole cereals and minerals should be sufficient - leafy grass will have plenty of protein, so they just need extra energy.

**Chronic lameness** is a common reason for ewes being thin. I regularly see flocks where the shepherd doesn't think they have a problem with lameness, but I do! It's a matter of perception of what is acceptable, both from an animal welfare and a production perspective. Lame ewes will rear fewer and poorer lambs.
The industry accepted target for lameness in sheep is that **on any one day, less than 2% of ewes should be lame.** So, start counting your lame ewes – if you constantly have too many, suggest that we help you put a plan in place to make a real difference. It's easy to keep 'chasing' the problem, just injecting the lame ones every time you get the sheep in – but doing that usually just means that the number of lame animals remains much the same – you use a lot of antibiotic, but don't get on top of the problem.

## Should you treat ewes for worms and liver fluke pre-tupping?

Let's look at worms first. **Fit, mature ewes have good immunity to worms, so are unlikely to benefit from worming**. And, as worming fit adult sheep selects strongly for resistant strains of worms, there is a disadvantage in worming them. But how about thin ewes – well, firstly, it would be better if you didn't have any thin ewes just before tupping. But, if you do, it would be worth submitting some faeces samples to the practice for a worm egg count. A possible reason for the ewes being thin is a particular type of worm called *Haemonchus.* These worms are very prolific egg layers, so it's generally quite easy to tell whether *Haemonchus* is present from how high the worm egg count is.

If you know that you have **liver fluke** on your farm, the question is when the ewes should be treated. No flukicides have any persistency, so treating too early is a waste of time and product. The risk of disease due to liver fluke varies depending on the amount of rainfall over the summer. In this area, **the fluke risk this year is low**, so we do not recommend treating sheep yet. However, try to avoid grazing sheep on areas

with mud snail habitat over the next few months, as this is the period when the fluke will leave the snails and infect the sheep.

Ewes and rams are likely to benefit from **extra selenium pre-tupping**. Slow release boluses are an effective way of maintaining selenium and cobalt levels. We stock the Agrimin 24-7 Ewe boluses and aim to be as competitive as possible with the price.

And don't forget to **vaccinate replacement ewes against abortion** 4 weeks or more prior to tupping.

September is a **high risk time for lungworm in cattle**. Disease due to lungworm can be fatal, so if you notice groups of cattle coughing, don't delay in treating them. For spring born calves that will be weaned at housing, it's best to worm and **vaccinate against pneumonia** prior to housing. There are a number of pneumonia vaccines and the product choice will vary between farms but should be stated in your health plan.

**Pasteurellosis in lambs -** We've seen a number of cases of lambs dying due to pasteurellosis over the past couple of weeks. In most cases, the lambs have not been fully vaccinated. This time of year is always a high risk time for pasteurellosis, and lambs need to have had 2 doses of **Heptavac P or Ovivac P** to have some protection. If ewes are vaccinated pre-lambing, the antibodies lambs get from colostrum only protect them against pasteurella for 2 to 3 weeks. So it makes sense to start vaccinating lambs when they are 3 to 4 weeks old, with their second dose 4 weeks later.

**Ram fertility -** Fertility testing rams before use is a sensible safeguard if you use single sire mating groups, for young rams that you are using for the first time and for any rams where you may have any reason to doubt their fertility. The testing is best done on farm with a couple of cull ewes that have been sponged to bring them on heat. So, this means that you need to sponge the ewes about 10 days before we will be testing the rams. So, if you have any rams that you think you might want tested, contact us so we can set things up. Young rams brought from sales have frequently been over fed and this can adversely affect fertility for a while. So it's often worth testing these.

**Quarantine treating bought in sheep -** Yard on arrival and treat with a **group 4 or 5 wormer** and inject with Cydectin 1% (as long as the sheep haven't had Footvax) or Dectomax to avoid bringing in sheep scab. The group 4 or 5 wormers are Zolvix and Startect. We can dispense small volumes as required. Also consider whether there is a risk that purchased sheep may be infected with **liver fluke**.

**Cow condition -** Spring calved suckler cows should be in good condition after a plentiful grazing season. If you start to run short of grass, it's more efficient to wean the calves and feed them, than to let the cows lose condition. **Hypomagnesaemia or staggers** is a risk both when cows are on lush autumn grass and when cows are short of feed. We often see cases of staggers in the autumn in spring calved cows that are just on straw or hay and still have big calves at foot. Straw alone does not provide adequate nutrition for cows at any time because it doesn't have enough protein.