

Winter Farm Animal Newsletter 2016

Now we are into the depths of winter, us farm vets are all gearing up in preparation for the lambing and calving season ahead. Henry caesared a ewe recently with a single lamb weighing 10 kg (22lbs). It's time to judge our winter rations to see just how the stock is performing. Are the in-lamb ewes holding their own, or are their lambs starting to make an impact with metabolic disease not far away? Autumn calvers: are they bulling well and holding in-calf? Spring calvers: are they in too good a condition and is this going to cause calving difficulties?

We are selling wormers, lambing supplies and vaccines such as Heptavac now, so do have a look at our enclosed flyer with prices. Meg Peberdy has joined us from H&C Pearce and will be happy to help. She is working alongside farm vet Max Hardy who joined in the summer from Mole Valley, so the pair of them will have plenty of experience to help you.

In this newsletter we also add our inaugural piece on Game Birds. Max has worked for a number of years with Game Bird disease management and has written an interesting article.

TB

Not much news other than we are in the busy period for testing. Over 7000 head tested in November and January looks to be busier still. Your assistance in making this job as safe and efficient as possible is very much appreciated. There is talk that post-movement TB testing in Lincs and other 4 yearly testing parishes will occur this year but it is not yet clear whether the government or farmers will pay for this. An EU referendum and exit from Europe will likely make a large difference as much of the TB testing is driven by our EU membership.

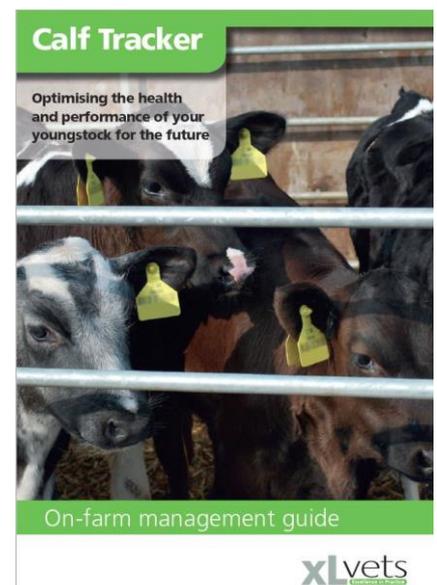
CALF TRACKER

An exciting new initiative is currently being launched by XLVets with the aim of optimising the health and performance of your youngstock for the future.

It centres round the concept of metabolic programming, which if done correctly is an early window of opportunity to improve your herd performance – don't miss out on optimising your calves' performance.

A dairy calf fed to optimal levels will: grow quicker, be more resistant to disease and increase its productive potential as an adult cow. Our calf rearing aims to weaning are:

1. To produce a well grown calf who is a competent ruminant at weaning
2. To prevent and control any health problems
3. To achieve this at minimum cost



Calf Tracker is a program that will provide valuable information on the key criteria necessary for maximising calf performance, but it will also require information gathered on farm by both farmers and vets to allow data collection and comparison to enable benchmarking of data. Benchmarking is a really valuable tool for both famers and vets as it allows us to compare yourselves against your peers and it allows us to compare the systems we work with day to day. XLVets has developed a unique online system with which to compare your results against a large number of calf rearing systems in the UK. This is something we will be introducing at our Dairy Calf meeting.

Top ten tips for successful calf rearing:

1. **Successful calf rearing starts before birth:** ensure that the health and nutrition of the dam is right and that your calving facilities are good.
2. **Colostrum is key:** this cannot be over-stated as it is the foundation for everything else you do.
3. **Consistent feeding regime:** promote good digestion and health; promote good oesophageal groove function.
4. **Provide adequate nutrition:** do not underfeed milk, set target growth rates, consider whether there are potential health and lifetime performance benefits from growing calves faster.
5. **Concentrate feed more important than fibre for rumen development:** provide clean straw to minimise consumption of soiled bedding but ensure water and concentrate ration are available ad-lib.
6. **Wean gradually:** adopt one-step weaning – ideally one week before weaning halve the volume of milk fed but do not change the concentration. For example, if feeding 3 litres twice daily, then drop to feed 1.5 litres twice daily.
7. **Clean, dry, fresh environment:** if your buildings provide this you are off to a good start; moisture is perhaps the biggest danger to calf health.



8. **Ventilation:** is tricky for young calves. If you are struggling with pneumonia seek veterinary attention to resolve housing issues.

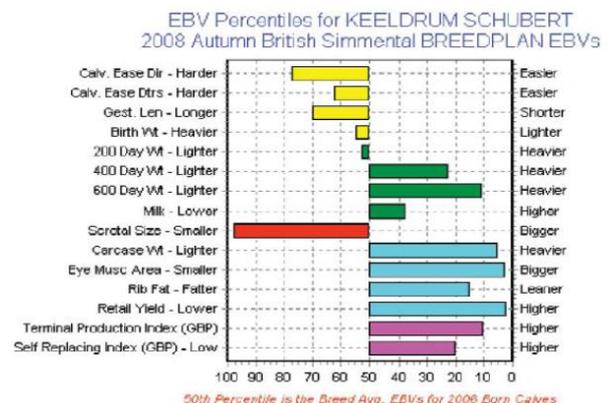
9. **Consider calf jackets:** as calves are burning energy once the environment temperature drops below approximately 12°C. Calf jackets also allow more ventilation without causing calves to be chilled.

10. **Set targets for growth, health and cost of rearing:** chest circumference for calves, weight and height for growing heifers

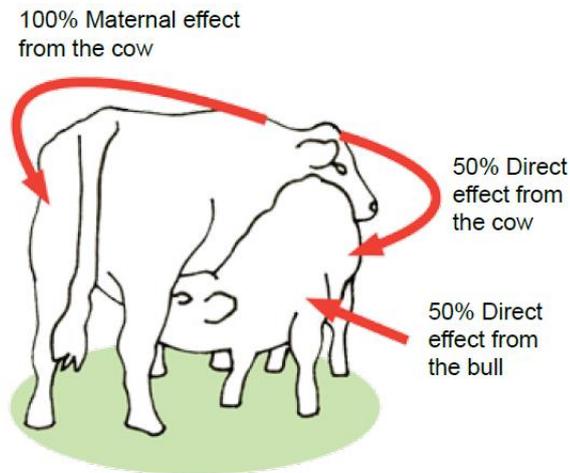
Please contact **Harriet** as our **Calf Champion** within the practice to get involved, or attend one of our upcoming meetings.

ESTIMATED BREEDING VALUES

Estimated Breeding Values are measurements of genetic potential which can be used to assess a bull's breeding merit for a specific trait and they have been available for



an increasing proportion of the bulls bred in the UK since the 1980's. These values include different aspects such as calving ease, growth and carcase attributes and maternal attributes.



Each value has an accuracy which is expressed as a percentage (%) and indicates the amount of data/information that has been used to calculate each EBV. The higher the accuracy, the more likely the EBV is to predict the true breeding value of the animal and the lower the likelihood of change in the animal's EBV as more information is analysed for that animal, its progeny, or its relatives.

Maternal trait EBVs are only expressed by females such as first age calving and milk production so we have to consider that for direct EBVs (genetics of the calf) each parent has an equal effect on the progeny's performance.

EBVs are one of multiple tools used at Saltby Heath Farm where Roger, Susan, Duncan and James Hazard manage one of the best Limousin pedigree herds in the UK. "It's a useful tool but still the visual appearance remains very important for us as well as the background of the animal and the health status," says James. There are several values to look at depending on the farm objectives, as Duncan explains: "We try to focus more on those values which can be measured accurately: the gestation length (when using AI), scrotal circumference, 200/400 day growth and muscle/back fat depth which is measurable by scanning." Both agree that the 200 milk value is very relevant; more milk means weaning heavier calves so less intake is required. Each farm is different so decisions are made guided by a variable range of judgements. For example someone may be looking for an easy calving animal – so they need to find a bull with short gestation lengths and light calf birthweights, even if it means sacrificing some growth and carcase attributes. Another farmer may want really good growth values even if the calving values look harder.

One can find EBVs in the sales catalogues of cattle and sheep and on the website of each breed (comparisons can be made using EBVs between bulls of the same breed, but not different breeds). It's a very useful tool, but remember that, as the name says, all these values are estimated!

MINERAL DEFICIENCIES

We are finding these much more commonly and it can be the cause of underlying problems in both your herds and flocks. The main minerals we look at are copper, cobalt and selenium, in addition to this we are seeing more cattle that are low in iodine. These deficiencies are easy to diagnose with a blood sample in a green top tube and can be easily and relatively cheaply treated with an intra-ruminal bolus.

Copper

Signs of copper deficiency are usually seen in young animals at pasture and manifest as poor growth rates. Grey/brown discolouration of the coat especially around the ear margins and eyes giving a 'spectacle-eye' appearance. Poor coat quality and lack of shedding of winter coat is seen. Lameness, diarrhoea and poor fertility are also seen.



Cobalt

Poor appetite, reduced growth and anaemia develop over weeks/months. The skin becomes thin with poor hair quality.

Selenium and Vitamin E deficiency - White muscle disease

Both selenium and Vitamin E play key complementary but independent roles to protect cells in the body against damage. Skeletal, cardiac and respiratory muscles are the most susceptible to damage.

Two forms are seen:

1: Congenital - stillbirth, or the birth of a weak calf that is unable to suck unaided and usually dies within a few days of starvation/secondary bacterial infection.



2: Delayed form - calves between one and four months-old. Signs are usually seen at turnout to pasture in the spring due to increase in exercise. The clinical appearance varies according to the muscles affected.

-Skeletal muscles - there is sudden onset stiffness and inability to stand. Otherwise, the calf is bright and alert with a normal appetite.

-Respiratory muscles - the calf presents with respiratory distress.

-Cardiac muscle - there is sudden death without previous signs of illness.

Treatment

These can be treated with Vitesel injections and response to treatment is usually seen in 4-7 days.

Iodine

Production limiting, whether that be growth rates/milk production and tends to have more subtle effects on fertility and barren rates in cattle and ewes. Also crucial in the 3rd trimester of pregnancy for calf/lamb viability and thrive with deficiency leading to increased neonate mortality.

If you are worried about mineral deficiencies then please contact the practice and we can arrange someone to come and sample or give advice according to what treatment would be best. Intra-ruminal boluses are preferred to mineral buckets as this ensures that all cattle receive the required amount rather than relying on cattle going to the mineral buckets.

SHEEP

We have been investigating a new lameness in sheep which is not typical of any recognised causes and so far nothing conclusive has been diagnosed by the APHA. As many as five separate farms are infected with most ewes becoming infected over the autumn. Raised circular bleeding 50p-sized lumps develop mostly above the bulbs of the heels but can be anywhere on the legs or



occasionally on the nose or head. Neither ORF or dermatophilus (strawberry footrot) have been found on biopsies or swabs although our suspicions are that it may be atypical CODD similar to digital dermatitis in dairy cows. Fortunately it resolves very quickly with a lincomycin/spectinomycin spray and an injection of long-acting antibiotic, and all ewes have remained in-lamb.

Barren Ewe Check: We have a FREE lab test where we can investigate barren ewes with a blood test. It is paid for by MSD. Common causes are toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion. If you have more than 2% barren it is likely there is an underlying problem that needs to be looked into. Please call us to make use of this.

GAME BIRDS: Reviewing your season

With the shooting season drawing to a close, whatever the size of shoot, it is worth taking some time to review the percentages from last year. Every season is different with the abundance of natural food and weather conditions playing a huge part in how well your birds hold in the drives and perform on shoot days. However several studies show an average of 20 – 30% poult mortality before the shooting season even begins. The majority of losses occur due to predation or disease, with one, increasing susceptibility to the other and *vice versa*. In addition, many of the common diseases (gapeworm/hexamita/coccidiosis/bulgy eye) have a hangover effect with poor flying birds only becoming evident on shoot days.



Record keeping: Reviewing the performance of individual release sites allows you to identify problem areas that lead to recurring losses. Firstly, if rearing birds from day olds you should have an accurate rearing percentage to release, with suitable targets set. The numbers of birds placed in each pen should then be recorded along with any known losses. Over the early season days note if any birds are reluctant to fly or fail to reach the guns as this may indicate sub-clinical parasite or disease burdens. Finally assess the condition of the birds on the game cart and record the shoot day returns from each release site. Any poor results may highlight particular areas of the production cycle or shoot where efforts and investments should be focussed. Also remember once the season begins very little can be done to treat disease, but a correct diagnosis will still highlight any alterations required to prevent recurrence the following season.

Release pens: Aim to identify the major reasons for under-performing sites. The first few days after release are incredibly stressful for a poult's immune system and hence we frequently see disease outbreaks that are unfairly blamed on the supplier. Routine post-mortem on arrival can be helpful in this case and small changes to husbandry or existing pens e.g. tree felling or extension into open ground may make a huge difference to how well birds start. However if problems occur year on year, then moving the release pen may be the only option. Choose sites with minimal disturbance with the rough guide of providing equal amounts of open area, low roosting/shrub cover and taller trees. This allows birds to find their best environment and reduce stress whatever the weather or predator pressures. Reviewing disease incidence and diagnoses well before next year's birds arrive allows changes to be made during quiet times.

Whether bought-in or home-reared, once birds enter the release pens they should be monitored closely. Disease outbreaks in a pheasant pen will often first show as birds losing weight, allowing you time to react before mortality occurs. However partridges may only show subtle signs e.g. increased food wastage, before heavy mortality, so extra vigilance is required. Close attention should be paid to feed and water intakes, as reduced consumption is often the first sign of a problem. Although tempting to open up and spread birds from release pens when disease is suspected, it is advisable to

seek veterinary advice first. Correct diagnosis through post-mortem allows controlled medication to be administered quickly at the correct dose. However, once birds are released they frequently have free access to other sources of food and water around the shoot making medication difficult. Also sub-clinically affected birds, especially partridges, are far more susceptible to predation from both foxes and raptors. Ongoing percentage losses can be huge if birds aren't treated first.

For advice on any gamebird-related queries please contact Max at the Melton branch on 01664 567481.

FLOCK FERTILITY MEETING

In December we held a very informative sheep meeting which focused on flock fertility and the many different components which can have a huge effect on scanning results, right through to actual numbers sold off farm.

We had positive feedback from those that attended - some felt they would be able to see improved results if they implemented some of the suggestions while others thought it helped them re-focus on best practice. Also it was the first time many had seen our new large animal vet Max as he is usually based in the Melton area.

UP AND COMING MEETINGS:

Annual Practical Lambing Meetings:

Kings Road Veterinary Practice, Melton Mowbray on Tuesday 2nd Feb – 7pm start

The Langton Garden Centre, Market Harborough on Thursday 4th Feb – 7pm start

These practical meetings are designed to refresh your knowledge on diseases and problems which you may encounter during the lambing season. It is a great opportunity to get hands on and ask any questions.

Veterinary Procedures Day:

To be held on Wednesday 17th February from 10am until 3pm by kind permission of Mr and Mrs Stanbridge, Beauchamp Grange Farm, Harborough Road, Kibworth, LE8 ORD. Our veterinary procedure days have been very popular in the past as they give farmers the opportunity to practice new techniques. The aim of the day is to further prepare you for dealing with large animal emergencies and to give you a taster session on giving intravenous drugs and taking your own blood samples.

If you would like to book on to any of our courses please contact 01664 567481. Spaces are limited so early booking advised.

STAFF NEWS

Matt has left us after 3 years to pursue an interest in small animal surgery. We have 2 new vets starting in the next couple of weeks so you will either meet them on farm or in the next Newsletter where Katharine will be interviewing them.

Sadly at the end of last year we had to say goodbye to Kirsty Black, who as many of you know played a key role within the farm department. We are all very grateful to her and sad to see her go, but there are lots of challenges ahead to keep her busy and you may still see her around!



This has meant we have welcomed a new, and very capable, member to the farm administration team, **Meg Peberdy**.

Hi Meg, would you like to introduce yourself? Hi I'm Meg. If you speak to me on the phone I answer as Farm Meg. I'm 24 and come from Kibworth (near Market Harborough).

Where have you worked before Rutland Vets? After studying, I was a farm worker for a number of years milking, lambing, droving at market, as well as 'light' tractor work. For the past three years I worked for the farm merchants H&C Pearce, based in the Market Harborough area.

And are you working anywhere else at the moment? I milk two mornings a week for a local dairy farmer, I must be mad, but I love the cows and keeping hands on. I will also be doing some nights lambing for the farm next door.

What else do you do apart from working three jobs?! What do you like to do in your spare time? What spare time? Aha! In my spare time I'm guilty of owning two horses, so if I don't smell of cows or sheep it's usually horse! I also have a little Jack Russell called Mutley, so when the seasons are right we go beating, and of course ratting!

What are you looking forward to about working here? I am looking forward to no day being the same! When I wake up I have no idea what challenges we (at Rutland Vets) are going to be faced with. It's exciting and a little daunting, but working with such a great team it makes even the hardest task achievable.

I am also looking forward to working with the new vet Max. Together we are able to provide advice on products in relation to worming and vaccines. We have the facilities at the practice to do faecal worm egg counts and blood testing to really identify and tackle the parasitic threats to each individual farm. It's a new string to the Rutland vets bow, so I'm excited to be part of it so early on and help it grow.

What's your favourite drink - tea or coffee? Why is alcohol not an option to this question? Aha! In that case it's tea!!! White no sugar (and if we are at a dairy - milk straight from the tank please!)

Where would you want to visit if you could go anywhere in the world? I'm a sucker for a busman's holiday, I worked in North Yorkshire for a short time lambing, and I'd love to do it again. I enjoy learning about different farm systems, and regionally they vary so much. It's amazing what small and handy tricks and tips you pick up as you move around regions and farms.

And finally what would you do if you won a million pounds? I should do something sensible with it, like start on the property ladder and invest the rest? But that's rather sensible, in truth I'd buy a plot of land and build a big shed, rear a few calves up to stores, and & maybe run a few ewe lambs around for the year!