

PRACTICE NEWS

As I write this a large proportion of the grass in Southeastern England appears to be being picked up off the floor. Some good cuts of grass are likely to be had if this nice bit of weather holds up.

The South of England show will be upon us soon. If you are going along please look out for me on the Wednesday, Maarten on the Thursday and Sarah on the Friday.

This month saw me do a bit of unexpected horse work. Just after finishing a fertility routine on one of our dairy farms, the farm team and I had to dash down the lane to see a horse which had gone over in a ditch. Only when we



got there did we realise that a rider was underneath the thing. A bit of sedative later and the rider was freed. Soon after that a 'proper' vet arrived to knock out the horse and it was hauled out and off to safety in a nearby field. The Fire service's lifting gear was on another job, so the trusty Merlo got put to good use. Not the usual day but was a bit different and everyone appears to have made a good recovery. That's about all from me, hope all he silage comes in nicely and the maize gets a good start.



Ben

Vasectomy in the ram (Sally)

Summer is the time of year to start planning for the next breeding season and making sure you have teasers fit for the flock is one of the first tasks. Ram vasectomy requires adequate planning as the post operative interval is 6-8 weeks before they can be introduced to breeding ewes, to ensure sterility.

'Teasers' or vasectomised rams can be used to both advance oestrus activity by about two weeks if desired, and more importantly tighten up the lambing period. This is due to "the ram effect" which is a powerful natural phenomenon that utilises the effects of male pheromones secreted in their wool wax on non-cycling ewes. The smell of these pheromones produces an immediate hormonal response in the ewe within half an hour of exposure so almost all ewes in the flock will ovulate within a few days. The exception will be ewes which have already begun to cycle for the year. The first ovulation will generally be silent with two peaks of normal heat occurring 18 and 26 days later and ewes that don't conceive will cycle again 17 days later which should produce a tight lambing period over 2-3 weeks.

When using teaser rams, a number of principles should be followed:

- The ewes should totally isolated from the sight or smell of rams by at least a mile for 6 weeks before the teasers are introduced (including neighbours rams)
- They should be in with the ewes for up to 14 days, but they can be left in for a week then out for one week before introducing fertile rams. However just two days' exposure can be sufficient and would allow their use in other groups of ewes consecutively.
- About 2 teaser rams should be put with 100 ewes.
- When the teasers are taken out, the stock rams should be put in, but a higher number should be used due to the synchronisation effect with approximately 1 fertile ram per 25 to 30 ewes.

Vasectomy of rams is a procedure which we carry out frequently and is done on farm under heavy sedation or general anaesthesia. A small section of the vas deferens is removed surgically (the tube that carries sperm from the testicles) from each side. Selection of ram for use as a teaser is important as he should work within the flock for a number of years. A young, fit, strong animal with good teeth and feet, sexually mature and showing good libido would be top of the list. The recommendation is that they are semen tested before going in with the flock to ensure they are not fertile and re-tested each year before use as a precaution.

For any more information please contact one of us at the practice.



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Claw horn lesions (Claire)

I was quite surprised to learn that when looking at foot trimming reports for freshly calved, housed cows in the Winter time, up to 95% have sole bruising noted down. This is not necessarily causing lameness, but bruising can be a precursor to sole ulcer. Calving naturally affects the basic anatomical relationship between the bone in the toe of the horn and the horn capsule, but from around 12 weeks calving this relationship starts to regain its status quo. However, risk of lesions is increased from these changes depending on diet and cow comfort. Superimposed effects of nutrition and cubicle housing in one lactation increases risk for lameness in the next. Now that the cows are out for Summer it might be time to address some of those housing niggles to improve your cow comfort for next Winter.

Heat Stress (Sarah)

Traditionally, cattle rely on evaporative and non-evaporative methods of cooling to maintain a constant body temperature. The non-evaporative methods (radiation, conduction, convection) become less effective with a rise in temperature and so animals rely on evaporative methods (panting and sweating) to regulate temperature.

An increase in body temperature is related with a decrease in dry matter intake, a decrease in milk yield and a reduced efficiency in milk production. Thankfully, climatic conditions in the UK mean that there are only relatively short periods of heat stress for our dairy cattle, but it is still important to put in place strategies to maximise cow performance during these times.



Courtesy of NADIS.org

Research suggests that ambient temperature only need rise to 25 degrees celsius in order for a Holstein to be classified as heat stressed. So, what can we do?

- Measure temperature in buildings for housed animals, you may be surprised how much of the time the temperature is over 25 degrees celsius!
- Provide shading for outdoor animals, cows know when they are too warm and will preferentially use these areas provided that they are of sufficient size
- Install a cooling mechanism for housed animals, these include fans, wetting the cow and evaporation
- Don't forget the dry cows, as heat stress during the dry period leads to smaller calves and a lower 305 day yield
- Although heifers generate less body heat and can dissipate heat more readily than lactating cows, an excessively hot environment may have an effect on feed intake and therefore daily weight gain

International Cow Fertility Conference (Claire)

I have recently returned from the glamorous heights of Mayo, Ireland where I attended the ICFC kindly sponsored by CEVA. Its aim was to look at the challenges facing farmers and animal health professionals around the world, focussing on fertility and its relationship with nutrition, post partum cow management and health, pregnancy establishment, genetics, heat detection and synchronisation, and sexed semen. A few points that were emphasised include:

- Milk production and fertility are not incompatible. Post calving energy balance is not correlated with milk yield or milk solids, but is correlated with dry matter intake.
- Early subclinical ketosis (3-7 days in milk) is more detrimental than later ketosis. 4.5 increase in culling risk in 1st 30 days of lactation.
- Overfeeding dry cows can cause all the same problems as fat cows cause even if the cows are not visibly fat, with potential evidence that there are benefits of one low energy ration in the dry period and not giving a close up higher energy diet.
- Importance of beef heifers calving at approximately 24 months and reaching puberty at 13 months so they have had at least 3 cycles before service—dairy breeds tend to reach puberty at an earlier age.
- Dogs are good at heat detection in cattle!
- There has recently been developments in a vaccine against reproductive tract disease that has effects on reproductive performance, but does not effect the amount of clinical endometritis seen.
- Practical means of controlling reproductive tract disease are lacking
- Hangover effects of transition cow problems can last for 4/5 months into the lactation.
- Americans synchronise animals, a lot!
- Risk of twinning is driven by milk production, due to lower progesterone before AI causing an increased chance of double ovulation.