THE LIVESTOCK PARTNERSHIP
SUCCESS THROUGH HEALTH

NEWSLETTER February 2015

Well, a lot has happened since our last correspondence! Claire has had her baby, a lovely little boy called Cameron William Walker, weighing in at 7lb 11oz, Mum and baby are doing well and we extend our congratulations to Claire, Joe and Big Brother Jack.

Our new vet, Amy, has landed back in the UK from New Zealand and we look forward to seeing her out and about in February. We are also starting to see some Winter lambs on the ground! We have heard of some strange presentations of Schmallenberg around the UK, so please do let us know if you are suspicious of a problem.

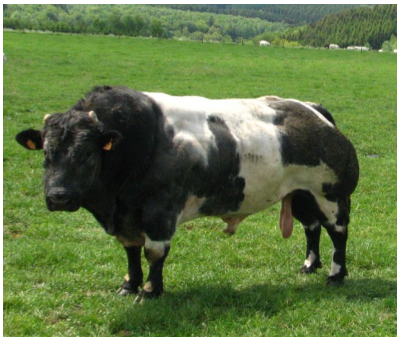
Cheers

Sarah

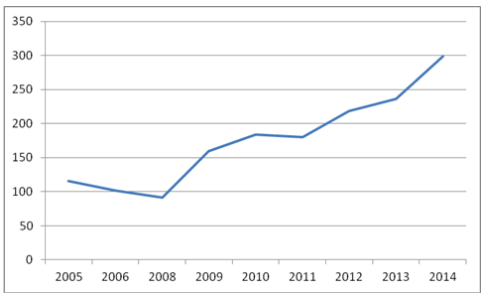
Baby Cameron

Bull Pre Breeding Soundness Examination (*Maarten*)

It is that time of the year again that I sit down and analyse last year's figures. As the graph shows, last year more bulls than ever were tested by the practice. It demonstrates that fertility testing is now widely accepted as a tool to root out the problem bulls, either pre-breeding or as part of a pre-purchase examination. The majority of bulls are now examined on an annual basis, pre-breeding, which reflects that people clearly see a benefit to doing this. It should however be seen as a risk reduction process, rather than a guarantee of fertility as it is viewed by some.



On some occasions this year bulls didn't perform despite being tested as suitable breeders. When examined again I found two bulls that had developed a corkscrew deviation of the penis, a bull ejaculating a large number of white blood cells (pus) and a young bull that was unable to cope with the number of females presented. As a rule of thumb you can say that a bull can cope with as many females as his age in months. This would mean a 2 year old bull, 24 months, can cope with 24 females. A mature and tested bull can cope with up to 50 females. On a few occasions we never found anything wrong with the bull and had to take the investigation further. Unfortunately the pre-breeding examination cannot include other factors, such as libido or ability to mate.



Number of bulls tested

Nothing will guarantee success, but steps can be taken to minimise the risks of mating going wrong. For example, are your animals on a rising plane of nutrition? Are your heifers well grown (>60% of mature weight) when put to the bull? Is lameness in bulls tackled promptly? Also, remember that first calved heifers will still be growing themselves, while also suckling a calf. This is well recognised in dairy cattle where sometimes poorer conception rates can be seen in this age group.

Please feel free to contact one of us if you feel that breeding hasn't gone as well as expected. Hopefully we can help you identify the reasons why and help to prevent these from happening again this year.

Our new member of the team, Amy, has built up a wealth of experience with bull pre-breeding examinations while working in New Zealand. She will help me this season to get all bulls examined in time. Her van is kitted out as a lab to facilitate testing whilst out on farm.

Hypocalcaemia in sheep (*Maarten*)

Hypocalcaemia is not uncommon in late pregnancy. Unlike in cows, hypocalcaemia in sheep is normally seen 3-4 weeks prior to lambing when calcification happens in the fetal bones. Animals become unable to rise and are disoriented. They go into a coma and die within 24-48 hours. This condition is often confused with pregnancy toxaemia (twin lamb disease) and animals therefore receive incorrect treatment. Pregnancy toxaemia happens a bit later; 1-3 weeks prior to lambing. In my experience hypocalcaemia happens more quickly and often in several animals, shortly after a change in diet or upon housing. The rapid treatment response to IV calcium injection does also help to differentiate between hypocalcaemia and twin-lamb disease. Prevention should be based around making sure that dietary calcium does not exceed the animals requirement. This sounds weird but by slightly depriving the ewe of calcium, the animal's body will adapt in such a way that it can draw calcium from her bones in times of a sudden increase in demand i.e. stress of handling or dog-worrying.

NOTICE BOARD

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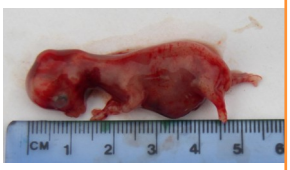
Abortion in sheep part II (*Sally*)

In last month's article I covered Enzootic abortion. This time I will touch on three other common infectious causes.

Toxoplasmosis: No sheep to sheep spread of Toxoplasmosis. Sheep become infected if they eat feed or drink water that is contaminated with cat faeces which contains Toxoplasma. Infection of sheep in early pregnancy kills the foetus and ewes may present as barren. Infection of ewes later in pregnancy may result in abortion, stillbirths and weakly live lambs, often accompanied by a mummified foetus. Following infection sheep are immune and should not abort again due to Toxoplasmosis. Treatment – No drugs are effective in an outbreak and although aborting ewes are not a danger to other ewes they should be isolated as more than one cause of abortion may be present. ewes they should be isolated as more than one cause of abortion may be present. Control - A vaccine is available for future years to be administered at least 1 month prior to tupping (vaccine cannot be given to pregnant ewes). Anticoccidiostat drugs can be administered to feed to in-lamb ewes in future years to help reduce abortions. If you have lots of farm cats consider having them neutered as young cats are the greatest source of infection.



Salmonellosis and Campylobacteriosis. These are both bacterial infections and introduced by carrier animals (sheep and wildlife). Clinical signs - abortion in late pregnancy usually in the last 6 weeks. With salmonella the ewe may also be quite sick (off-colour and scouring) and some strains may even result in death. Treatment - Antibiotics may help with Salmonella**.** Control - Mix bought in replacements with the resident flock for as long as possible before mid pregnancy. During an outbreak isolation of aborted ewes and hygiene measures are very important in reducing the spread of these infections. Longer term immunity from Campylobacter normally occurs in the flock .

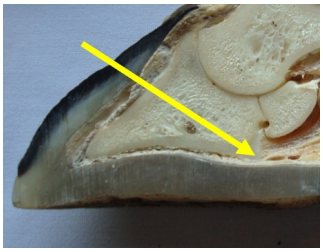
Please speak to one of the vets about getting barren ewes screened for Toxoplasma using a diagnostic service subsidised by MSD Animal Health. This scheme is available until 31st March 2015.

Solar ulcers (*Ben*)

The other day, whilst I was removing a cow's claw because of severely infected sole ulcer I thought; I know, I'll write a series of articles about sole ulcers for the next couple of newsletters. I am hoping that over the next few months, reading these articles will help you guys with your lameness by:

1. Improving understanding of the causes of sole ulcers and thereby improving prevention
2. Ensuring that treatment is prompt and effective

We also had a talk in the practice for us vets by Roger Blowey who is a real lameness enthusiast and he gave us some good tips.



Sole ulcers are one of the most common lesions we see. They are also the most expensive type of lameness as they take a long time to recover and are the lesion that are most likely to result in the culling of an affected animal.

What is a sole ulcer? It will help if you think of sole ulcers as a pressure sore. Underneath that hard hoof on the sole of the foot is living tissue that is responsible for the production of the horn that lies over it. When this living tissue becomes bruised or damaged, firstly this is painful and, secondly, the horn it produces is of extremely poor quality. If the bruise is not allowed to heal then the production of horn stops completely and you are left with a weak point in the sole through which infections can easily penetrate (see picture of boiled out hoof showing the deficit in the sole going all the way through)

Why do cows get them? We don't really see sole ulcers in grazing cows of beef cows so sole ulcers are a result of how we manage them, in particular:

1. WEIGHT BEING TAKEN ON THE SOLE: The primary reason is that cows are not designed to take weight on their sole. Grazing cows have a 'proud' wall; weight is NOT taken on the sole. When we put cows on concrete and the 'proud' wall wears back then sole becomes flat and weight is taken on the sole (in fact, animals will develop a 'wedge' of sole over the sole ulcer site, further exacerbating the excess pressure). The shape of the bone that sits in the hoof (the pedal bone – equivalent to your finger tip) is such that it has a lump on the bottom that puts pressure on the living tissue (see photo and yellow arrow).
2. MOVEMENT OF THE PEDAL BONE: Around calving the structures in the foot that hold everything together slacken a bit (the same thing happens to the pelvis to allow the calf through). This exacerbates the pressure on the living tissue as it becomes compressed.
3. CUSHIONING: The foot contains fat which acts as a cushioning pad. In thin cows, heifers and cows losing weight the cushioning effect is reduced and bruising occur much more easily (see the pictures of dissection where you can compare cushioning in a thin cow on the left vs a fat cow)
4. LYING TIME: Cows which spend a long time standing up have continuous low grade pressure which leads to the bruising and pressure sore

Food for thought for now – more next time on treatment and prevention