

Spring is springing as illustrated by the fertiliser spinners going out in force but I guess we could do with a bit of warmth to really get the grass going. In our house it has definitely sprung as we seem to have acquired a couple of



pet lambs (pedigree Lleyns, no less!) for the boys to have a go at looking after. Early indications are that, whilst keen, their Mum and Dad appear to be doing most of the work. Let's hope they don't turn their toes up without any warning as is the tendency for bottle-fed lambs.

We have seen a few cases of listeria over this winter, both in terms of sick animals (brain abscess) as well as abortions. A major cause of listeria is the inclusion of soil into forage, particularly round-bale silage. Now is the time to make sure you get on top of any mole problems prior to silage making to help prevent soil-contamination of forage.

A reminder for you all that those jobs such as dehorning and castrating need to be done before the flies come out in force. We are really not keen to do these jobs (especially dehorning) during fly season as the risk of wound infestations becomes very high. **Ben**

### Nematodirus in lambs (Sally)

Nematodirosis is a nasty disease in lambs, with high mortality and stunted survivors. Under certain climatic conditions when warm weather follows a cold snap it can strike very quickly, with little or no warning. The main difference in the life cycle of *Nematodirus battus* compared with other parasitic worms, is that development to an infective larvae takes place within the egg and infection passes from lamb to lamb from one year to the next so risk is highest in pastures that carried lambs the previous spring. Once temperatures reach 10°C (April/May), *Nematodirus* eggs on pasture from last year's lambs will hatch into infectious larvae en masse, posing a significant risk to new season's lambs and this hatch frequently coincides with the time when lambs are starting to take in significant amounts of grass and so the result can be devastating. Treat by drenching with a white (BZ) wormer and in high risk seasons, a total of three treatments with an effective anthelmintic given three weeks apart will control disease. The timing of the first dose depends on the prevailing temperatures and will vary seasonally. No two farms are the same, so we recommend that you develop a specific strategic parasitic control program for your own farm.



### Sole ulcers (Ben)

Over the past 2 articles I have talked a bit about sole ulcers – what causes them and how to tackle them once they have been identified. Crucially, though we also have to think about how we are going to prevent them happening in future. Many experts say that a cow never fully recovers from a sole ulcer even if treated well (the damage to the corium can last a long time) so in terms of sole ulcers prevention is vital.

In order to prevent them let's just recap on the causes: Too much weight bearing on the sole, movement of the pedal bone at calving, lack of cushioning (fat) and reduced lying times.

Bearing in mind these risk factors I tend to look at prevention in a few key areas:

1. General points:
  - a. Do what you can in terms of cow comfort – getting the cows to take weight off their feet is the most important thing you can do.
  - b. Trim all cows as regularly as required to make sure that weight is not being taken on the sole ulcer site. Given the high risk period around calving the pre-dry off trim is a really useful way of achieving this.
  - c. Minimise weight loss after calving in all animals. The causes and prevention of this are beyond the scope of this article but take a look at your peak lactation animals and compare them to your transition cows – is there significant weight loss? Weight loss is very important for many problems we see in dairy cows but now we know that sole ulcers are also another reason to maintain condition and a good digital cushion.
2. Heifers: Make sure heifers are used to the conditions they will face after calving. Get heifers used to concrete prior to calving. Make sure they are trained to lie down in cubicles. Give them enough space to and time to lie down and rest their feet to prevent bruising turning into ulcers. Heifers often won't have their feet picked up until their first dry-off trim, but they will often also benefit from a preventive trim either pre-calving (if practical) or within a month or 2 after calving. Very often when you pick up heifers feet for the first time they have a prominent wedge of sole over the ulcer site and this needs to be removed.
3. High-risk cows: We now that cows that have lost weight and are thin or have had ulcers before will be at high risk. Get their feet up early post-calving so that you can at least remove weight from the ulcer site. Some of these animals may even benefit from a block for a period of time just to allow the diseased claw to recover fully. When you are dishing out the ulcer site and you can see bruising or yellow, soft horn at the ulcer site then you are just in time for helping to take pressure of a problem area.

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### We are pleased to announce....

... that back by popular demand is The Livestock Partnership Calendar for 2016! Would you all please get snapping and send pictures to [sarah@livestockvets.co.uk](mailto:sarah@livestockvets.co.uk). We had some great entries for the last calendar, but not all of them were of good enough picture quality, so as high a resolution as possible for the images please. Thanks!

### A snippet from the southern hemisphere (Amy)

It's been a tough season so far for dairy farmers in NZ with the payout dropping from a record \$8.50/MS in 2014 down to around \$4.70/MS currently. On top of that, the government declared half of the country in a drought, with most dairy farmers relying near enough 100% on pasture feed, this has hit some people hard and they are drying off cows now (instead of the normal late May/June) due to having no feed. Needless to say with the current milk price here I am sure you can understand what they are going through.

Farmers now will have done their final pregnancy scans and have a good idea of how mating has gone. Since the removal of routine inductions many will have had short mating periods of around 10 weeks, so empty rates often sit up around the 9-11% mark if things are going well and 6 week in calf rates ideally up around 78% but quite a few will be happy with >70%. I understand it has been a reasonably good season for mating results possibly reflecting the extra efforts farmers are now putting in to manage this.

One aspect of improving mating performance in recent years has been a push to keep cow condition good. Many farms will condition score the herd quarterly, some more frequently and intervene accordingly depending on the time of year. A good app – Dairy body condition score – is available to help them do this, which is what you need when scoring herds with around 800 cows! At this time of year if cows are on the lower end of target they will often milk one group once daily and then also dry this group off earlier than the rest. If done early enough it works well.

As a vet in NZ at this time I would have been doing annual consultations where we plan drying off and dry cow therapy for each farm, and also their annual drug prescription for the coming year. It was a great time for us to catch up on how the year has gone and make plans for the following season.

If you are interested in any farming practices I may have experienced or been involved in over in New Zealand then please feel free to get in touch I would enjoy discussing them with you.



### Clostridial disease (Sarah)

Clostridial organisms can be found in two forms, either as living cells or dormant spores. The significance of the dormant form is that livestock can be infected for a period of time before the activation and toxin production that causes clinical symptoms. It is important to recognise that Clostridial diseases are NOT passed from animal to animal and thankfully there are very effective and cheap vaccines available to protect animals from disease. Here is a summary of the most common Clostridial diseases seen in the UK:

**C. haemolyticum** – Survives in contaminated soil, but when ingested the spores lodge in the liver. First symptom often death, or may see fever, abdominal pain, respiratory disease and blood in the urine. Mortality in untreated animals is 95%.

**C. chauvoei** – Naturally found in the intestinal tract, spores remain in the soil for many years. Causes 'blackleg' in both cattle and sheep. Typically cattle are 6-24 month old beef breeds that are growing well, with no sign of skin injury. In contrast, sheep cases are most often associated with a skin lesion, for example at shearing. First symptom often death, or may see preceding lameness and depression.

**C. novyi** – Present in intestine and liver of herbivores, as well as in the soil for prolonged periods of time. Often associated with liver fluke migration. Clinical disease is sudden onset and first sign is often death.

**C. botulinum** – Most cases 'botulism' is contracted by ingestion of toxin in feed. It is rapidly fatal and characterised by paralysis, alteration in vision and difficulty chewing/swallowing. Tends to occur in outbreaks.

**C. perfringens** – Widely distributed in soil and intestines. Potentially a cause of a 'jejunal haemorrhage syndrome' in early lactation dairy cattle. First symptom often death, or may see anorexia, colic and milk drop. Also causes high mortality in young lambs and calves via intestinal damage and diarrhoea.

**C. tetani** – Widely distributed in cultivated soil and intestines. Opportunistic, via an infected open wound, with a delay of 10-14 days before symptoms seen. Symptoms include spasm of muscles (in particular jaw), hypersensitivity, erect ears, stiff extended tail, third eye prolapsed, nose dilated, sweating, dilated rumen.



Blackleg



Botulism



Tetanus