

Antibiotic usage (Sarah)

I cannot stress enough how lucky we are in the UK to be able to prescribe antibiotics for their use on farm, that can be administered under our direction. By far the most important things in terms of treatment are the DOSE and the DURATION. Without boring you with the detail, drugs work to kill bacteria, in most cases, by achieving a certain concentration in the blood for a set length of time. By under-dosing, either in terms of ml administered or by not giving a full course, we not only significantly reduce the chance of cure (and remember that you have the best chance of cure on your first attempt at treatment!) but also promote the chance of antibiotic-resistant bacteria on your farm. So if we all stick to the following rules, we will improve the effectiveness of treatment:

Does the animal actually need antibiotics? – Always, always, always take the temperature. If it is not elevated you do not have evidence that they are required.

Look at the dose (in ml per kg) on the bottle/data sheet – You are better to slightly round up than risk under-dosing. Ensure that you give a full course – If you are unsure of the duration of action of any drug, call us. Bear in mind that in human medicine, you will rarely see a shorter course prescribed than 7 days.

Remember that advice is free – We can advise on the most appropriate treatment and identify any other issues that may be causing the symptoms.

TB testing (Ben)

Following on from Sarah's update on the current situation in West Sussex last month I am taking the opportunity to make you aware of the change to the administration of TB tests. As many of you will be aware, DEFRA have been through a process of putting the TB work in England and Wales out to tender. A company called XL Farmcare has won the bid and it is their job to ensure that all government TB testing (routine testing, annual testing, radial testing etc.) is carried out in an efficient manner.

We took the decision to register with XL Farmcare as a provider and we are essentially a subcontractor to this company. Many practices in the South East region have elected to give up TB work during this process, and their clients will either have a different practice doing their TB work or they will pay their existing practice if they want them to do it.

What does this change mean for you? Essentially there will be some administrative changes to how your future tests will be organised. You will receive letters from XL Farmcare notifying you of upcoming testing, but it will be us, your normal vets, that carry out the test. Ultimately it is your responsibility to ensure that your tests are booked in on time, but we will continue to make sure that we can arrange a suitable time for you. Under the new scheme there will be an additional requirement for us to send confirmation letters to all clients, which will remind you of your responsibilities in terms of safe and efficient handling, the provision of sufficient members of staff and accurate animal identification. We are going to be audited in terms of our testing procedure and the speed with which we test animals will be recorded and monitored. The increase in administrative paperwork at our end is significant and will be audited, so we need to get it right! Please bear with us as we adapt to the new system. All of this is being done with the background of an approximate 30% reduction in our fees for TB testing alongside a dramatic increase in the testing burden that we have seen (especially in West Sussex) over the past few months. This isn't a great combination! Hopefully the new system will work out OK. Please let Maarten or me know if you have any concerns with the new system.

Scanning with an Introducer (Amy)

Whether you are a dairy, a beef suckler herd or heifer rearer, scanning cows is a vital management tool. We have recently purchased an introducer probe which can be used with our scanners for pregnancy diagnosis. The advantage of this is that we don't have to insert our arm into the cows and therefore it is a useful way to scan when doing large numbers of animals at once. Cows don't have to be done one at a time in a head bale but instead you can fill a race and they can be done over the rail. So with the right setup it can save time and therefore money.

It is only accurate down to 42 days and is best when only doing pregnancy checks, and not other examinations such as looking at the ovaries and postnatal checks, so is not practical for routine clinics on dairy farms. However for seasonal dairy farms interested in 6 week in-calf rates, for heifer rearers and suckler farms it can be an excellent way to scan.

There is a small risk with scanning of rectal perforation which can lead to peritonitis. However in my previous NZ practice we scanned thousands of cows and this complication was extremely rare.

If you are interested to know if this might benefit you please give me a call to discuss it.



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Health Plan Review (*Maarten*)

As June is a quieter month for most of you it is a good time to sit back and take stock. How well did the spring calving or lambing go this year? How many were scanned pregnant but failed to lamb/calve? How many were born alive and how many were lost in the first 48 hours? These are just a few of the parameters we use to review the health plan. Yes, there is a benefit of calving a cow or pushing a prolapsed uterus in but by far the best return to your business is the annual review by trying to identify the strengths and weaknesses of your enterprise. Perhaps the scanning % can be improved by a few percent. When was the last time pregnancy losses were investigated and can these be reduced? What are the pre-weaning losses and can these be reduced? Have you got an effective worm control in place? Have you analysed the killing sheets supplied by the abattoirs recently? Pleurisy, pericarditis, fascioliasis what do all these mean? Little gains in all these areas add up quite quickly to extra lambs/calves that can be produced each year. Beef and lamb prices are under such pressure that it is extra important to tackle all those inefficiencies that have crept in unnoticed over the years.

TB testing—Frequently Asked Questions (*Sarah*)

The standard test for TB in cattle is a skin test, in which two types of tuberculin are injected into the skin on an animal's neck and then re-examined for a change in skin thickness 72 hours later. The two types of tuberculin used are avian (injected at the top, or on the left side of the neck in young calves) and bovine (injected on the bottom, or on the right side of the neck in young calves). When we 'read' the test 72 hours later, we look at the difference in measurement between the top and bottom site and classify an animal as Clear, an Inconclusive Reactor (IR) or a Reactor.

Q) Can cattle be moved between the first and second visit of a TB test?

A) No, with the exception of an emergency in which a license must be sought from AHPA.

Q) Can I administer other products (wormer, fly spray, antibiotic etc.) on day one, or between day one and three?

A) No, with the exception of an animal that requires treatment for welfare reasons.

Q) Is a lump at the top injection site (avian) OK?

A) If this is the only lump detected, then yes. If this lump is significantly smaller than a lump at the bovine site, then the animal may be an IR or a Reactor.

Q) What is an IR?

A) An animal that, due to imperfections in the skin test, cannot be truly classified as either a Clear animal or a Reactor. This animal must be isolated from the herd and retested after 60 days - this test will be completed by the ministry in most cases. If this animal is clear at retest they may re-enter the herd, however if they are inconclusive a second time then they will be deemed a Reactor. Milk from an IR can still go into the bulk tank. You will be placed under a temporary movement restriction until a risk assessment is carried out by AHPA.

Q) Can I kill an IR before the retest?

A) You must speak to the AHPA in order to obtain permission for this. These animals may only go direct to slaughter.

Q) What is a Reactor?

A) An animal that has failed a skin/blood test, or an animal that has tested as inconclusive on two consecutive tests. These animals are DNA tagged and immediately isolated until slaughter is arranged. Milk from these animals must not enter the bulk tank or be fed to other animals on the holding. Your herd will be placed under movement restriction and be put on a whole herd 60 day testing regime. You may be required to carry out a Gamma Interferon (blood) test on all animals. Herds within a 3km radius will require an immediate whole herd test and be required to pre-movement test all animals over 6 weeks of age.

Q) Why was I told that an animal was a Reactor, but no lesions were found at Post Mortem?

A) In the early stages of the disease, no lesions are visible. Laboratory samples are routinely collected and sent off for culture, which take at least 6 weeks to gain the results from. Unfortunately it is not possible to culture TB in a laboratory from every positive animal.

