

In the last week I have been asked a few times about Pre-lambing metabolic blood profiles. Blood sampling ewes 2-3 weeks before lambing allows enough time to make nutritional adjustments.

Earlier than this, sheep are not yet in the high risk period and so there is the potential that some energy problems could be missed. If the ewes are sampled later than this the opportunity to make nutritional adjustments for the benefit of the flock are limited.

Groups of no less than five sheep in each category (triplet, twin and single carriers) should always be sampled. Sheep in negative energy balance may develop pregnancy toxemia (also known as twin lamb disease) due to the combination of low blood glucose and the toxic effects of the ketone bodies produced by fat breakdown. The treatment of preg-

nancy toxemia is often unsuccessful (only 33% survival in one study) so prevention is preferable to cure. Determining the BHB levels 3-4 weeks before lambing allows adjustment of the diet if necessary to minimise the risk of pregnancy toxemia and avoid the other problems associated with negative energy balance such as poor colostrum production.

Another parameter is blood urea as low protein intake results in suboptimal colostrum quality and reduced milk production leading to reduced lamb growth rates. Low protein levels are also associated with reduced immune system function.

Please let us know if you are interested in blood testing your ewes pre lambing

*Maarten*

### Ewe nutrition at lambing time (Sarah)

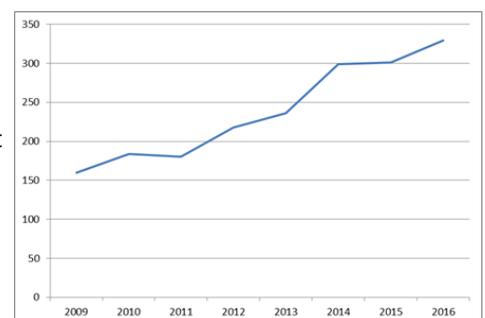
For those who haven't lambed yet these 6 weeks in the run up to lambing are some of the most critical for the ewe. This is when the lambs are undergoing their main period of growth, colostrum is being manufactured and the ewe is most at risk of a serious energy deficit if not fed and managed carefully. Some of you may have had your forages analysed to help gauge exactly what you might be feeding, and just as importantly what you may need to supplement with. When deciding how to supplement the silage or forages remember cereals (wheat in particular) are an excellent source of energy, but at high levels (more than half/kg/per day) they will depress forage intakes, and reduce its digestibility (ruminal acidosis). When cereals are fed as straights, they can be fed whole with hay, but should be lightly processed if fed with silage.

By having the ewes scanned and BCS you have the chance to group them according to their likely energy demands both in terms of how many foetus's they are carrying and current BCS. Thus feeding the flock efficiently and for optimum productivity. It is well worth remembering that cases of pregnancy toxemia (twin lamb disease) is not the only price we could pay for under feeding our ewes. Lamb mortality is likely to be higher, and this is due to a number of factors. Lambs from undernourished ewes have less brown fat, leaving them more susceptible to hypothermia and hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) following birth. Colostrum is also likely to be poorer, both in terms of quantity and quality, so lambs do not receive enough protective immunity. Udder development also takes place during late pregnancy, so there is a knock-on effect on milk yield following lambing, which could have detrimental effects on lamb growth rates; seriously eating into profit margins. It is worth remembering that getting ewe condition and feeding right will have far reaching benefits. We can investigate how well ewes are doing on their pre lambing rations by taking some blood samples from 5 ewes from each different management group 3-4 weeks pre-lambing. This is the optimum time to see how she is coping on the diet, but give us enough time to make some changes if necessary. Please give me a call at the practice to discuss prices and what we can do for you.



### Bull testing (Maarten)

In 2016 we have examined 329 bulls for a pre breeding MOT in the practice. Although bulls account for only 2-3% of the breeding animals they could be seen as half the herd. A lame bull can have disastrous consequences as this not only affects its ability to mate but also its libido. This year again we have seen cases where lameness was not taken seriously and infection had caused fevers influencing sperm quality. We have seen some eye watering cases of penile deformities like wart and cork screw deviations. It is also not uncommon for small immature bulls to injure themselves in the action. Therefore it is vital that bulls are not over-worked. As a rule of thumb the number of females to a bull should be the age of the bull in months i.e. 24 month old bull with 24 females. The graph shows that most farmers recognise now the benefit of a pre breeding examination and see it as an annual precautionary measure that is a quick, easy and safe way to ensure that "half" the herd is fertile when the mating season starts.



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### Sheep Discussion Group (Sarah)

With the lambing season already under way for some of you, or imminent for the rest, I think it's a perfect time for me to meet you all and give you a chance to voice your opinions on how we can provide a better service to our sheep clients. I will be talking about how we can go about this, and about a data collection programme called Stocktake. There is a short survey we have created to help us plan the meeting a little better, you should be receiving an email with the link in your inbox imminently! If you don't please give us a call and let us know. It should only take a few minutes and we would be really grateful for your input. The meeting will be on **Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2pm** at the practice. Light lunch provided. Please RSVP to the office.

### Vet Spend Monitoring for Dairy herds (Ben)

As many of you will know we switched practice management software (the package we use for invoicing etc.) recently and one of the reasons for this was to allow us to provide feedback on vet fee and medicine spend. We have tried this in the past using our old system, but it was very laborious and time-consuming. The new system would allow us to do it at (almost) the click of a button. We are pretty much able to present the spend data in any number of ways, so before I go and do it all wrong, I thought I would open it up to suggestions from you all as to how you would be interested to have any vet spend data presented. My thoughts so far are that we could present the data in the following ways:

Total vet spend as a total figure and as a pence per litre cost based on annual milk production and as an £/cow.

Vet spend split into meds and fees

Fee spend split into routine work, emergency work, health planning work, lameness etc.

Meds split into category, e.g. vaccines, fertility, mastitis etc.

Comparing vet spend costs to health performance compared to agreed targets.

This information could be presented as a monthly figure as well as quarterly and annual rolling figures, much like some of the dairy costings figures we see produced from Kingshay and the like. I would very much welcome any suggestions from any of you over the next couple of months as we work with the IT team to get this up and running. Feel free to drop me an email or give me a call to discuss any thoughts.

### Digital dermatitis and Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis (Megan)

This month I attended the Sussex Grasslands society meeting. It was great to see some familiar faces but unfortunately no one from any of our beef or sheep farms attended. See you there next time! Dr Nick Bell AHDB gave an interesting talk on Digital Dermatitis and CODD which focused on some of the practical ways to keep disease off your farm, to keep lesions at bay if you do have it and how to treat. 90% of herds and 35% of flocks are affected by DD and CODD respectively so it is not something to be ignored.

Treponemes are spiraling bacteria which enter the feet when they are wet. These bacteria are found in Footrot (FR), CODD, DD, necrotic toe and wall ulcer lesions however, FR and CODD affect sheep differently. It is now thought that many yeasts are involved in DD infections as well as the bacteria.

Udder infections- caused by treponemes from the feet of the same cow or another cow cross infecting the udder when she lies in the cubicles.

Freshly calved cows are at risk of DD as their ability to fight disease diminishes at this time, therefore, focusing on the first 4-8 weeks after calving could be vital to your plan. Keep it away from your heifers! It has been shown that if heifers had a case of DD before calving then 30% of those heifers went on to get DD after calving.

Keeping DD away: KEEP FEET CLEAN AND DRY. Quarantine. Keep a truly closed herd/flock. KEEP SLURRY OFF THEIR FEET- straw yards and grass graze systems have the advantage here. Disinfect hoof knives between animals and even individual feet.

Treating cows: Copper gel/spray is a great way to treat DD. Reason: Yeasts respond well to treatment with copper and zinc. Salicylic acid may work as it helps to strip away the keratin. 3 days of antibiotic spray applied to clean, dry feet.

Footbaths: DAILY footbathing with formalin will help to keep DD at bay and if you catch it before the lesions reach the M2 stage you may see some cases cure. Once lesions reach M4, footbathing will keep lesions in a dormant state but will not remove DD from the feet. Remember: Formalin is carcinogenic. You don't want to be regularly breathing in the fumes.

Treating sheep: Evidence recommends: Do not trim, treat with injectable amoxicillin antibiotic. However some anecdotal evidence has seen cure rates with foot trimming. KEEP FEET CLEAN AND DRY



Picture from Nadis