

Welcome to spring everyone. Many of you will be pinching yourselves about the very kind weather we've been experiencing with grass growth for spring-calving dairy herds being excellent and conditions for lambing being near to ideal. Well let's make the most of it as when the rain comes it'll probably come with a vengeance.

There are various hot topics at the moment. Schmallenberg has been discussed a fair bit as in some parts of the UK it has been widely reported but we don't seem to have seen that much locally. Some of the early lambs seem to have been affected and a few spring-calving sucklers but nothing much more than that. A questionnaire went round to vets asking if there was much appetite for vaccination and we reported that there probably wasn't for the majority of commercial farmers.

The farmers weekly reported concerns about the supplementation of copper to cattle. Very timely as Maarten and I are investigating a case of copper toxicity in a bunch of rear-

ing dairy/beef calves. Copper is a bit of a goldilocks mineral. Supplementation needs to be 'just right' as otherwise you can get deficiency or toxicity. In this case copper was over-supplemented to weaned calves. We have seen toxicity in adult cattle before but this is the first time I've seen it in young calves. Owing to quite high concentrate feed rates the calves in question got a lot more copper than need and started dying of copper toxicity which is largely untreatable. Once the diagnosis was confirmed on post mortem specimens we have been able to feed a mineral lick that 'binds' the copper up to try and reduce the copper levels in the liver. Fingers crossed this halts the losses from now on. Those of you feeding more than 3kg concentrate to growing cattle be very wary of copper levels PLEASE. If in doubt send us over a photo of the mineral ticket to advise. Happy Easter everyone. Enjoy the chocolate....

Ben

Genomics trip to Dorset... A farmer's perspective. (Joe Ives)

On the 21st March Claire organised a mini bus to take a group of us, along with Maarten, to visit 2 farms in Dorset primarily to discuss genomics. As is the great thing with such trips when you get a group of farmers together no topic is off limits, so we ended up talking about anything and everything.....a great way to broaden your horizons!

- The first farm was the 240 cow Longmoor Holsteins near Gillingham, the home of Stuart & Helen Rogers. They are both very focused on breeding high genetic merit 'polled' cows, selling stock at high profile sales and bulls to AI studs. They have all their heifers genomic tested and use this information when choosing bulls to make a genetic improvement in all areas over the Dam whether it be type traits such as pins, leg set, teat length or other areas such as milk yield, mastitis resistance etc. Genomics gives them much more accurate data than PLI or Pedigrees ever can. Many of the older cows go to beef with the higher genetic merit heifers going to sexed semen or flushed. They also had cameras in their calving shed and bulling heifer shed linked to their phones which is a great idea but would really mess up an evening out!

- The second farm was the 330 cow Grange Farm at Pulham, the home of James Yeatman and family. His Holstein herd is Autumn block calving and aims for calving in 9 weeks so is very focused on fertility to get the cows back in calf. Overall herd conception rate is 44%, with 1st lactation heifers 1st service conception rate of 55% to sexed semen. We had a presentation here by Mark Burnell of Synergy vets on how genomic testing can be used to accelerate a herds genetic potential and target those cows and heifers we should be breeding from.....or more importantly.....shouldn't!

So a really informative trip, even if genomics wasn't your thing, there was much to be gained.....great sandwiches too.....



Nematodirus (Maarten)

With the warm days we have had in March, early born lambs will be at risk for Nematodirus. Nematodirus eggs hatch as soon as daily temperatures exceed 10°C. Only young (grazing) lambs are affected by nematodiosis as lambs are becoming age-immune from three months of age. The main symptom is profuse watery scour. Affected lambs are dull and depressed and if left untreated will die from dehydration. Symptoms should be differentiated from coccidiosis which is most often seen in lambs aged four to eight weeks old. Affected animals are often seen straining and blood will be mixed in the dung. Nematodirus is best controlled by grazing susceptible lambs on pasture not grazed by lambs the previous year. Where this is not possible, lambs can be treated with a white drench (benzimidazole). Exact timing for this can be found on www.scops.org.uk/alerts.php. The use of worm egg counting to time Nematodirus treatments is too risky as immature larvae are causing disease.

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Heifer discussion group meeting (Claire)

There will be a heifer group discussion meeting at the beginning of May. If anyone is interested in joining the group then please let me know. Topics to date have been calf feeding pre-weaning, post - weaning, grazing and post grazing. We have a mix of outside speakers, on farm visits and pub/ practice meetings. Any ideas for future topics are also welcome. If you would like to be added to the list please contact Claire@livestockvets.co.uk ps. I am looking to run a full AI course in May or June. Please contact me if you are interested.

Ensuring survival of newborn lambs (Claire)

The average number of lambs weaned from lowland flocks is 155 lambs from 100 ewes put to the ram. The average scanning percentage in these flocks is over 200. Lamb deaths in lambs 0-3days old range from 10-25%, but we should be looking at a target <7%. Reasons for perinatal mortality can be nutrition, level of flock supervision or infectious disease.

Nutrition—this can affect lamb birthweight, ewe body condition score and colostrum accumulation in the udder. All factors that are essential to ensure lamb survival in the first 36 hours of life. Ewe body condition can be low (<2) when energy has been inadequate for 2 weeks in late gestation. It is normally more pronounced in ewes with twins or triplets. Worms and fluke should also be on the list for poor body condition score. Hungry lambs show a vigorous reflex to suck when first born, but if insufficient colostrum is available they quickly become hunched and the condition may progress to coma and death. If they do not take in enough colostrum they will progress to coma and death.

Birth injuries—lack of oxygen and trauma contribute to lamb losses. It is relatively common place for rib fractures to occur if lambs are delivered backwards. Meconium staining (lamb poo!) on the fleece when born indicates a stressful birth and may need extra attention to get them to suck.

Colostrum—it is easy to see if a lamb has sucked by feeling its belly behind the ribs. The lamb must ingest 200mls/kg during the first 24 hours, 50mls/kg in first 2 hours, if not sooner.

So to ensure the best start for your lamb—ensure it is coming into a clean environment, that it ingests sufficient colostrum, and the navel is dipped in strong iodine. Good luck!

Upcoming Grasslands meeting (Sarah)

We are delighted to announce that we shall be holding our first **'Grasslands Meeting' on the 26th April** with Charlie Morgan, an Independent grassland consultant. The idea behind setting this up came from our sheep clients originally, when we were consulting with them about how we can help meet their needs better. It is clear that optimising your grazing on mainly grass based systems is vital for making a farming enterprise as economic as possible. Historically the grazing season can be seen as the time to sit back and let the 'green magic' work on its own, but we want to help you find out what you can do make sure the 'magic' from you grazing really does pay off! It is a subject area that I am excited to learn about and we as a practice are investing for your long term benefit we hope. Charlie worked for The Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) for 22 years where he helped develop new grass varieties and grazing methods to benefit UK agriculture. He spent ten years as lead officer for sheep, beef and environmental management systems at the IBERS Grassland Development Centre. He is an author on over 60 scientific publications and regularly reported in National press and in 2014 he was awarded Associate member of Royal Agricultural Societies (ARAgS) for his distinguished service for Grassland & Technology Exchange. So we are very lucky to have secured a day with someone as knowledgeable and experienced as Charlie. The first part of the day: 9.30 – 11.30 will be aimed at beef and sheep producers. The lunchtime session 12.30 – 2.30 will be for those involved in young stock rearing. Locations TBC. Both will be practical, on farm walkabout discussion's. Please wear suitable clothing and footwear that can be properly disinfected. Please give the office a call or email to confirm you attendance, and to which session.

Imrestor (Megan)

Some of you may well be aware of a product recently marketed by Elanco called Imrestor. It is not an antibiotic or vaccine but a bovine messenger molecule which naturally occurs in the immune system. It claims to boost certain aspects of the immune function of dairy cows around the time of calving with the aim of reducing the incidence of mastitis and some other diseases associated with the transition period and hence, antibiotic use. It is licensed for use to reduce the incidence of clinical mastitis in the first 30 days of lactation. However, recent work done in Mexico indicates it may play a role in reducing the number of milkings that milk has to be discarded due to mastitis treatment, reducing retained placenta, increasing the 100d submission rate, milk yield during a period of disease but, potential increase in metritis incidence. It is worth noting that the study in Mexico is not perfect but some positive anecdotal evidence by UK dairy farms has been reported. An injection will never be a substitute for good management, but it may help to reduce antibiotic use where management can go no farther.