

Here we are already in December. The autumn has gone fast. Mild weather has resulted that cattle have been kept outside for longer than usual making use of the abundance of grass that we have had this year. However the mild weather has also resulted in pneumonia in housed calves. Most buildings rely on temperature differences to create a stack effect that drives ventilation. With outside temperatures similar to those inside there has been hardly any ventilation in many buildings. And with the extended grazing season we have also seen a bit more liver fluke compared to other years as the weather has been very wet ever since the end of July.

So what have we been up to? Megan has seen a very good uptake of the “knock down” disbuddings that we now offer on a reduced hourly rate. This technique is not only kind on the animals but also on the herdsmen as it is a stress free

procedure for everyone involved.

Many farming businesses rely heavily on subsidies, in particular sheep enterprises, and with Brexit in 2020 looming it is very uncertain if these can continue making a profit without support from Brussels. The Flock Health Club is one way we hope to help our clients to improve their gross profit margins. This month we have David Hendy speaking to the club about ewe nutrition.

The festive season is already upon us. We have listened to feedback from our clients and it has turned out that it is difficult to please everyone with the right Christmas gift. For this reason we have decided to donate the money instead to two charities: Chestnut Tree Children’s Hospice and Macmillan Cancer Support. Both charities are well known and have supported our clients in difficult times.

*Maarten*

### Young stock meeting round up (Megan)

Many thanks to Charlie Hughes for hosting our autumn meeting and to all of you who came along. Carsten Pederson from Livestock Feed Consultancy was our guest speaker. After benchmarking farms based on Age at First Calving we had a great discussion about weaning methods, the practicalities of weighing calves to gain accurate growth rate data and the different milk powders you all use. I was encouraged to hear that many are weighing animals already so we can now work with you to help get the UK average Age at First Calving down from 27 months to the aim of 24 months. At least for our farms! We enjoyed hearing the input from some of our beef farms too who already own weigh scales and are thinking about weighing at weaning to track accurate growth rate data there. Remember that all the little things add up to make the big difference when it comes to young stock. Correct concentration of the milk powder, feeding at the same time each day, correct temperature of the milk for all calves, weighing the milk powder and feeding enough litres of it. Hygiene, using a clean bucket which is cleanable! Keeping the method simple so calf feeding can be done by someone else if the main person is away. It’s getting cold now- those calves are going to need more milk, bedding and/or jackets if they are to grow at least 0.8 kg/day for Holstein and 0.5-0.6kg/day for crossbreeds.



### TB test Inconclusive Reactor (IR) restrictions (Maarten)

From the start of November all IRs in the High Risk Area (HRA) and Edge Area (and in TB breakdown herds in the LRA) having a negative result on re-testing will remain restricted for the rest of their life to the holding in which they were found. The only permitted movements off for such animals will be to slaughter, either directly or via an Approved Finishing Unit. However farmers have the option of paying for interferon gamma blood testing subject to securing prior approval from APHA. A negative gamma result can release the resolved IRs from life-long restrictions and it could move freely unless whole herd movement restrictions apply. It is important to warn you that if the test result is positive then the animal will be compulsorily slaughtered with compensation paid. Movement restrictions will be placed on the whole herd (if not already in place) and the standard TB breakdown procedures will then be followed. If a resolved IR is residing at temporary grazing when it re-tests clear, it will be restricted to the permanent CPH associated with the temporary grazing. Once the resolved IR moves back to the permanent CPH, it must be restricted to that CPH and cannot move back to a temporary CPH. Note that it is the cattle keeper’s responsibility to ensure that resolved IRs are restricted for life to the holding in which they were found. Although not a mandatory requirement, APHA recommend that such animals are physically identified to prevent accidental movement off the holding. This could be achieved by using a management tag or freeze branding, and/or marking the animal’s passport.

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### Repeat breeder Embryo transfer (Claire)

Keeping our animals productive and in the herd for longer is a crucial aim in the light of carbon foot print audits, consumer perception and economics. A replacement dairy animal costs approximately £1600 to rear so culling decisions should not be made lightly. Repeat breeder animals are animals that have had 3 or more services and not got in calf. This can be for reasons such as delayed ovulation, so that the egg is not released at the anticipated time, or complete failure to ovulate. We are now offering a repeat breeder embryo transfer service. It has been shown that you can increase conception rates of repeat breeder animals by doing conventional AI day 0 (when the animal is bulling – either a natural heat or by synchronisation) and then transferring an embryo (i.e. an angus cross) on day 7. The embryo may hold when AI has not worked due to problems with ovulation, but also it can get a poor quality calf from AI to hold, by increasing the amount of pregnancy hormones that are in the uterus. If this is something you think could benefit your herd please contact Claire at the office.



### Foot trimming course for clients (Ben)

We had a great opportunity to learn about sole ulcers on one of our recent Foot First Aid courses. I normally get a few dead feet from Hawkins which we can use for practising knife technique, foot balance and the like and this time one of the feet was clearly a little bit 'ripe' and on the first cut the whole hoof capsule came off! Anyway, it just so happened that the claw had been severely affected by a sole ulcer and it became a great learning exercise to see how the sole ulcer had developed. Sole ulcers should really be called 'sole pressure sores' and they are caused by the bearing of weight on the sole on the site of a bony lump on the pedal bone (the triangular bone that lives within the hard part of the hoof and is the equivalent to the tip of your finger). 3 things massively contribute to sole ulcers:

- Poor comfort and cow flow – cows spending too much time standing up instead of lying down taking the weight of their feet
- Loss of internal cushioning – cows are clever. They store fat around the foot to help provide cushioning (like a Nike Air trainer – other trainer brands are available). Thin cows and heifers don't have as much cushioning so are more prone to sole ulcers
- Poor hoof shape – For some reason cows tend to have overgrown soles that lead to increased weight bearing on this high risk site

Anyway this particular cow had a classic presentation and one of our students got some great photos for you to have a look at:

The horn over the bruising is weak and of poor quality so dirt can penetrate all the way through to the sensitive tissue. The 'stripy' appearance of the sole is due to multiple episodes of underrunning – wach of which will have been associated with a deterioration in lameness



Claw with the horn removed. Notice the source of the ulcer – the living tissue over the pedal bone has been badly bruised

The pressure on the bony lump has resulted in a dent in the living tissue that produces the horn.



### Bulls and suckler fertility (Maarten)

Within one week I dealt with 3 herds where the bulls were found to be the cause of disastrous PD-ing results. In one herd a newly purchased bull which was not tested, failed to get any animal in-calf. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> herd a five year old bull which wasn't tested this season, managed to get barely half the females in-calf. And in the 3<sup>rd</sup> herd the bull which was tested this season, had managed some pregnancies at the start, left a gap of 6 weeks and got some in-calf at the end but still leaving 18 empty. Luckily this herd was promptly pd-ed 6 weeks after the bulls had come out. The damage was limited by putting the empty cows with 2 other bulls again. Although late, at least some calves would be produced next year. This proves the point that pre breeding testing bulls can't guarantee fertility but at least it helps to reduce the risk of the breeding season going horribly wrong.