

Farm Newsletter – August 2009

BLUETONGUE VACCINATION REMINDER

Good things come in small packages, including the essential protection against the bluetongue virus, Bovilis® BTV8. This is the only licensed bluetongue vaccine available in 20ml bottles, suitable for vaccinating 20 cattle and sheep. This can be especially helpful if there are small groups of young stock need vaccinating.

Given that opened bottles must be used up within eight hours, a small bottle can sometimes be useful and go some way to minimising waste. In addition, because Bovilis BTV8 can be given to young stock from one month of age, calves and lambs born throughout late spring and summer can be vaccinated in small groups to ensure they are protected for the rest of the season.

Without vaccination, every animal remains highly susceptible to the virus because it is carried by a midge which feed indiscriminately on livestock. Even housed calves are at risk because midges live and breed indoors. However, vaccination together with measures to reduce the number of midges around calf housing protects individuals as well as helping reduce the spread of disease.

The vaccination course for Bovilis BTV8 is 1ml per calf, followed by a second injection of 1ml three weeks later. Full immunity occurs three

weeks after the second injection. Lambs simply require a single 1ml dose. The boosting regime for cattle and sheep is a 1ml dose within 12 months of the initial vaccination. The vaccine has a limited shelf-life and must be stored at a temperature between 2°C and 8°C.

If you have not yet protected your stock with bluetongue vaccine, please contact the practice to discuss how best to integrate it with your own health plan.

GOOD TIME TO START FOOTROT CONTROL

The drier summer months provide the perfect opportunity to start a flock lameness control programme. Lameness is a big issue for many flocks, but it is a problem you don't have to live with. Provided you tackle it on a whole flock basis, it can definitely be controlled

However, effective disease control starts with accurate diagnosis. If you have any doubt at all about the cause of foot problems in your flock ask for help. The causes of lameness include scald, contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD), classical footrot and shelly hoof and it can be easy to confuse the symptoms.

However, on many farms, footrot is the principal cause of lameness. It is a highly contagious condition caused by two different bacterial infections: *Fusobacterium necrophorum*, which infects the inter-digital

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hoof space, and *Dichelobacter nodosus*, which causes subsequent infection in the hoof itself.

When starting out on a footrot control programme it is important to isolate any lame sheep. This is often easier to do after footbathing than before because the lame sheep are more obvious. Sound sheep should return to pasture that has not had sheep grazing on it for the previous 10 days and the lame ones should be treated with a long acting antibiotic. Inspect these sheep seven days later and assess the response. If less than 75% have recovered review the approach and consider culling.

However, for many – particularly larger flocks – vaccination provides a more practical means of control. It is both an effective treatment for infected sheep, as well as providing long-term protection against further cases of footrot. The vaccine allows the sheep to build up immunity against *Dichelobacter nodosus*. Unfortunately, unvaccinated sheep do not produce an antibody response to this bacterium, which means they do not develop a natural immunity to footrot and will therefore remain susceptible year after year.

It is therefore worth vaccinating the whole flock before footrot levels increase. Prompt action will also reduce the financial impact of any lameness, as well as cut the time and labour input associated with treating affected sheep.

An initial injection of Footvax will stimulate an adequate antibody response in most sheep to treat existing infections and prevent new ones for up to five months. But it is advisable to give a second dose four to six weeks later for improved cure rates and longer on-going protection. Thereafter, an annual booster should be sufficient to control the footrot within most flocks.

GETTING COWS BACK IN CALF SIMPLY AND QUICKLY

Getting cows back in-calf on time is important for year-round calving herds wanting to deliver a level milk profile, but delaying service because cows are high yielding can work out to be a false economy.

Extending lactations reduces the annual income from milk sold per cow – even if 305-day yields are rising - because the herd ends up with fewer peak yielding cows contributing to the bulk tank at any one time and more stale cows in milk.

Yet for many herds, allowing lactations to extend is common, especially when heat detection remains poor – around a 40-45% detection rate. Extra cows (man hours per cow are now reducing in most herds) coupled with a seemingly never-ending list of tasks combine to put pressure on the daily work routine, leaving less time for heat detection.

So how to get cows back in-calf and on time? The easiest answer is to remove heat detection from the routine altogether. This can be done by following a simple 10-day programme called Intercept® which, with some vet intervention, means you can effectively automate heat detection and use fixed time AI. All it needs is regular vet visits to establish which cows are suitable (some herds select specific groups of animals) as well as good records.

Day 0 starts with an injection of Receptal®; Estrumate is given on day 7; a second injection of Receptal is then given on day 9; then fixed time AI on day 10. Cows can stay on the programme until they are pregnant, if it fails first time around.

This kind of routine has gained a lot of favour in larger herds, where man hours are limited and the extra cost of the treatments pays off with better heat detection rates and improved calving intervals as a result.

If you would be interested in discussing the use of Intercept in your herd, please speak to one of the vets.

HEIFER VACCINATION TIMING CRITICAL

BVD is now widely regarded as endemic in the UK national dairy herd and, although we don't seem to be moving towards a countrywide eradication policy, controlling this nasty disease on a farm-by-farm basis will improve many areas of cow performance.

BVD vaccines have been on the market for several years, and herds that incorporate them into their preventative healthcare strategies see clear benefits. However, getting vaccine timing right is essential if stock is to be properly protected.

Planning when heifers are vaccinated is a crucial starting point, as vaccine should be administered before they are pregnant. Bovilis® BVD can be used from eight months of age, so it is easy to ensure this happens. If vaccination is late and she is already in calf, the early part of the pregnancy won't have been protected from the virus. If she has been exposed to BVD while unprotected, both heifer and developing foetus can be affected sometimes resulting in late abortions, or alternatively in a PI (Persistently Infected) calf being born.

PIs are animals born seemingly healthy, but they 'shed' virus to herd mates. This usually occurs when an unprotected dam is exposed to the BVD virus in the early stages of pregnancy. PI animals often appear normal and can go on to develop within a herd. If

these animals get in calf they will always produce another virus positive animal. Once a PI is within a herd, any unvaccinated stock is at risk.

There are two parts of the control and management of such a situation. Intervet/Schering-Plough's subsidised bulk milk screening service, DairyCheck, which checks the level of infection in a herd. DairyCheck Plus will show whether or not the BVD virus is active in the herd. Once the herd's disease status is understood, a vaccination an individually tailored vaccination programme can be put in place.

It is worth remembering that animals infected with the BVD virus will have a reduced immune system. This means that they are more susceptible to other diseases such as IBR and some experts believe they may suffer higher levels of mastitis.

Contact one of the vets to discuss how to establish your herd's BVD status and options for vaccination.

BE EXTRA ALERT FOR FLIES AFTER RECENT HOT SPELL

Following the recent hot spell and subsequent period of wetter weather, populations of biting and nuisance flies on farms could be about to explode. Farmers should remain vigilant for any sudden increases in fly populations and make sure they have sufficient product available to treat any susceptible livestock – ideally before populations are allowed to reach levels where they cause significant irritation.

The time taken for most of the common biting and nuisance flies to produce new generations is dramatically reduced when temperatures rise above 26°C. Under ideal

conditions a single pair of houseflies can produce up to 64 million offspring in a season.

What's more, the number of flies that can be seen at any one time only represents around 15% of the total population. The remainder is made up of different stages of the lifecycle, which very soon develop into adults.

Keeping on top of fly control, with a product like Butox SWISH, is important because:

- Flies spread diseases such as Summer Mastitis and New Forest Eye ("Pinkeye")
- Calves bothered by stable flies have been shown to have lower live weight gain
- High yielding cows affected by flies have lower dry matter intakes which leads to a drop in milk yield, body condition and ultimately affects fertility

Butox SWISH kills nuisance and biting flies for longer than any other pour-on product. One application lasts for 8-10 weeks.

Warm weather also favours replication of the bluetongue virus in midges; at 28°C replication takes just three days, at 15°C it's as much as three weeks. Butox SWISH should be applied monthly for midge control as part of an integrated BTV control programme, comprising vaccination and vector control

PROTECT YOUR FINISHING LAMBS

Finished lamb prices may well have come off the earlier summer highs, but you can still ill afford to lose growing lambs at grass at this time of year – just before it's time to cash in your investment.

Clostridial disease and pasteurellosis can strike out of the blue. The bacteria that cause these diseases are widespread in the farm environment and often it only takes a trigger

factor such as a change in the weather to cause them to multiply rapidly and produce toxins that kill valuable lambs usually quite suddenly.

Unless lambs have been vaccinated themselves against these diseases, any passive immunity gained as a result of drinking colostrum from ewes vaccinated with Heptavac-P Plus will have gone by now on most farms – certainly against pasteurella. This passive immunity only lasts for up to 3-4 weeks against pasteurella and up to 12 weeks against clostridial bacteria.

To make sure your lambs are fully covered at this time of year they should be vaccinated with Ovivac-P Plus. Ovivac-P Plus can be used from three weeks of age and covers four different clostridial diseases (pulpy kidney, braxy, blackleg and tetanus) and pasteurellosis. The clostridial diseases covered are those that lambs from three weeks of age are most likely to encounter, plus pasteurella – a major killer of sheep and lambs in the UK.

The primary vaccination course involves two vaccinations 4-6 weeks apart. An annual booster can be given thereafter, but most lambs are slaughtered before then or re-vaccinated with Heptavac-P Plus instead if they are to be kept as breeding animals.

ADDITIONAL SUPPLIES OF LUNGWORM VACCINE DUE TO EXTRA DEMAND

Intervet/Schering-Plough, manufacturers of Bovilis® Huskvac has announced that, due to continued demand, a further batch of vaccine with an expiry date of 8th September 2009 has been supplied into the market. As usual, supply of the vaccine will then cease for the winter period.

Historically, lungworm infection (husk) has been most commonly associated with young stock but now almost 75% of reported cases are in adult animals which can have a very significant impact on the profitability of a herd. Husk is one disease where an animal's natural immunity must be allowed to develop as it matures. Sometimes, overuse of wormers in the first grazing season, coupled with poor grazing management and extended dry seasons can mean that an adult animal that has seemingly been protected for several seasons suddenly becomes naïve and likely to get husk infection.

Vaccination remains the most effective method of controlling of husk. On farms with a previous history of husk, vaccination with Bovilis Huskvac should be a priority. This is a live vaccine made from irradiated larvae; a process which makes them incapable of causing disease. The vaccine produces a very good immune response against disease but it does not prevent all worms arising from natural infections completing their life cycle. This means that on pasture grazed by vaccinated cattle, there may be a very low level of larvae on the pasture. If not all young stock are vaccinated, larvae numbers can increase very rapidly, particularly if the weather is wet and warm, which will lead to an outbreak of disease in any unvaccinated animals.

Contact one of the vets to discuss protecting your herd with Huskvac.

FLUKE TREATMENTS

There is some confusion over when to treat for Liver Fluke in sheep and which product to use. Hopefully this will help:-

Month	Treat Against
October	Adult and Immature Flukes
January	Adult Flukes
Late April/ Early May	Adult and Immature Flukes

Look on the product before you buy it. It will tell you which stage of fluke it is effective against.

Take care with ewes in lamb. Check the product is compatible with pregnancy.

In wet years:

- June (4-6 weeks after the April May dose) treat *again* against Adult Flukes
- November (4 weeks after October dose) treat *again* against Adult and Immature Flukes.