

Farm Newsletter – May 2009

SUBSIDISED ABORTION TESTING SERVICE

If you've experienced more than 3% of ewes aborting this lambing season it's well worth taking advantage of the Intervet/Schering-Plough Animal Health subsidised blood testing service that detects exposure of your flock to toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion (EAE). Simply contact the practice about the FlockCheck service which involves taking blood samples from 6-8 ewes that have aborted.

Data collected nationally shows that the most commonly diagnosed causes of abortion in sheep continue to be EAE and toxoplasmosis, despite the availability of highly cost-effective vaccines.

In 2008 over 260 flocks took advantage of the subsidised FlockCheck service with 78% testing positive for toxoplasmosis and 40% positive for EAE. The 2008 FlockCheck results are consistent with findings from previous years, in that around four out of every five tested flocks are infected with toxoplasmosis. Additionally, we also find consistently that about a third of flocks are harbouring both toxoplasmosis and EAE infections. Unfortunately, whilst EAE can cause abortion storms, many farmers may not realise they even have a problem, but there's no doubt that these infections do erode flock profitability.

The costs of lowered productivity are so great that vaccination is a cost-effective route to disease control. If toxoplasmosis is present in your flock, vaccination has been shown to produce a 6.4% increase in the number of lambs. The situation can be more complex with EAE if many ewes are already carriers of the disease. However, most farms will see a significant benefit from vaccination during the following season.

FLIES – HERE TO STAY OR ARE THEY?

Biting and nuisance flies present an annual problem to livestock farmers. In some years fly populations will be greater than in others, and this can be related to a whole range of variables. Weather conditions and the availability of suitable fly breeding and resting sites are significant factors. Predicting the scale of the problem is a very difficult task. From breeding sites around your farm, flies can hatch and reach maturity in a very short time, so even the best forecasts are likely to give very little time for farmers to treat cattle with a fly control product before populations reach nuisance levels.

The most effective approach to managing flies on any farm remains treating early and maintaining cover for the entire season with regular re-treatments. Delaying the first treatment until fly populations reach nuisance levels can have a dramatic effect on the number of flies you'll see on your farm, since as temperatures increase so does the breeding rate of flies. For example, at 15°C, adult stable flies only lay around one egg per day, but once the temperature reaches 26°C, an adult will lay over 26 eggs every day. Over its lifetime, an adult female stable fly will lay less than 30 eggs at 15°C, but over 700 eggs when the temperature rises above 25°C. Treating early and before temperatures rise will have a knock-on benefit for the remainder of the season and help keep populations at manageable levels.

Treating cattle for flies is also only part of the story. In order to really get on top of the problem, it is essential to identify breeding sites from around the farm.

- Treat or remove manure heaps, urine-soaked bedding and slurry lagoons
- Clean all effluent drains and organic pits
- Consider chemical treatment of fly resting areas e.g. posts, window frames and lights
- Keep cattle away from wet, boggy areas where flies breed

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- Consider alternative bedding rather than straw for housed cattle

Pour-on fly control products such as Butox® SWISH are effective at killing flies which land on cattle. When applied according to manufacturer's recommendations, Butox SWISH helps manage fly populations, particularly when used in conjunction with the measures outlined so far. Butox SWISH is the longest lasting pour-on product available for cattle, providing up to 8-10 weeks fly control. Fly control products only kill flies once they land on treated animals, so if measures are not taken to reduce breeding sites, fly populations will still rise when weather conditions favour breeding. This means it is important to keep fly treatments up to date.

SCOURS AT GRASS COULD BE CRYPTO

Together with rotavirus, cryptosporidia is one of the most common causes of calf scour in UK dairy and suckler herds. But scours caused by cryptosporidia are not always confined to housed calves. Calves calved outside in the late spring are also susceptible to infection between one and two weeks of age, particularly if conditions underfoot are muddy around ring feeders.

The major source of cryptosporidia is thought to be either adult cows (which act as carriers without showing signs of disease) or infected scouring calves passing the parasite in their faeces. The infectious dose of the organism is very low and if ring feeders are not moved regularly the disease threat around them can be very similar to the housed situation. Faecal contamination of feed and water troughs can also be reduced by raising and covering them.

If you do get any young calves scouring at grass ask us to test a faecal sample. Intervet/Schering-Plough Animal Health runs a subsidised scour testing service called ScourCheck, which will allow us to diagnose the cause of any scour problems on your holding – whether the disease is occurring at grass or when the animals are housed.

Cryptosporidiosis in calves is often seen in combination with other diseases, particularly rotavirus. So vaccinating cows against rotavirus with Rotavec-Corona® one to three months pre-calving – as well as a sound colostrum feeding regime and maintaining high hygiene standards – can often tip the balance in your favour.

If cryptosporidia is a particular problem on your unit, you can reduce parasite replication and excretion with Halocur®. Halocur® is the only product licensed to

treat and prevent cryptosporidiosis. Administered orally to calves after feeding (daily for seven days), it can reduce the severity of diarrhoea and prevent the infection spreading to other calves. Treated calves have also been shown to require fewer antibiotic and anti-inflammatory treatments, as well as less rehydration therapy.

PROTECT NEW SEASON LAMBS

With new season lambs recently topping 230p/kg in the live auction ring you can ill afford to lose any to preventable diseases. It's important to remember that the colostrum lambs receive from the ewe will only give them a limited period of protection against pasteurellosis and clostridial diseases such as pulpy kidney, braxy, blackleg and tetanus.

It is true that if ewes are vaccinated properly with Heptavac-P Plus in the run up to lambing lambs will also gain some immunity. As well as covering the ewe, the vaccine also increases the concentration of antibodies in the ewe's colostrum, which pass to the new born lamb when it suckles. This is known as passive immunity, but this protection only lasts for so long. Lambs receiving a good intake of colostrum (at least 200ml in the first six hours for a 4kg lamb) will have antibodies against pasteurella for up to 3-4 weeks and clostridia for up to 12 weeks.

Consequently, to make sure your finishing lambs are fully protected 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.

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.

It really is well worth making sure your valuable finishing lambs are fully protected. Pasteurellosis outbreaks are seen mainly in very young lambs – in the first week or two of life – and in 6-10 month-old lambs. An outbreak can be very costly, taking into account not only the value of any lambs lost, but also the lost growth potential in any surviving animals; as well as the extra labour and veterinary expenses associated with any outbreak. It is well worth remembering that it has been shown that the cost of one severe outbreak of pasteurellosis equates to around 50 years worth of vaccine use!