

Vet's Viewpoint - Vikki



I hope you have all had a good (albeit wet!) start to the year. As the busy period for the majority of our farms is nearly upon us, I thought I would take a bit of time to talk about management of the newly born lamb/calving, focussing mainly on colostrum, as setting new-borns up for success early on results in greater overall lifelong production.

Excellent perinatal hygiene is essential as ensuring clean bedding and dipping navals in iodine prevents naval ill/septicaemia. Aborting cows/ewes should be isolated immediately and any contamination disinfected. If you would like abortions investigated, please keep the entire foetus and placenta for us to test.

Thinking about colostrum quality and management is one of the most important aspects to ensure lambs and calves have the best possible start, and can help prevent a multitude of diseases.

- **Booster vaccinations prior to birth:** This boosts the number of antibodies in the colostrum that will help prevent infections in the new-born lamb/calving.

- **Producing sufficient volumes:** Regular body condition scoring and feeding accordingly, and in the case of sheep feeding ewes scanned for twins/triplets appropriately, will help ensure that there is enough colostrum produced by the mother. Cows should be BCS 2.5 - 3 in the month before calving, and ewes 3 - 3.5.

- **The quicker the better:** The gut's ability to absorb the antibodies from the colostrum starts to decrease from 6 hours of age and can no longer absorb antibodies by 24 hours of age. As a minimum, lambs should drink 200mls of colostrum in the first 2 hours of life, with a total of 200ml/kg in the first 24hrs. Calves should receive 10% of their bodyweight (usually around 4 litres) in the first 2 hours. If the lamb/calving is not suckling, colostrum can be fed by stomach tube.

- **Risk factors:** Be more vigilant for offspring of first time mums, those who have had difficult/assisted births and births with multiple offspring. All of these are at greater risk of not getting sufficient colostrum.

- **Quality:** A brix refractometer or colostrometer can be used to test the quality of the colostrum easily and quickly on farm.

We are running lambing workshops, both for those who have never lambed before and those who would like a refresher, on the 10th February and 10th March. These will cover the management of neonates and a hands-on practical for techniques, including tubing, so please call the office if you would like to book onto one.

- Please contact us if you want a ration plan for your ewes, or if you want to "sense check" your planned ration with us.
- Do you know what your sheep make of the ration? Metabolic profiling will tell you. It involves taking blood samples from 5 sheep from each management group about 3-4 weeks before lambing. The blood biochemistry results will tell us if they are getting enough energy, protein, magnesium and copper in the diet.
- If your scanning results are disappointing, don't suffer in silence, tell us! In particular, don't cull out the barren ewes until we have had a chance to blood sample them- this can be very informative, and the lab testing is subsidised for flocks over a certain size.
- Beware abortion. Isolate aborting ewes immediately, and make sure that the aborted foetuses and placenta are fully collected. If your abortion rate is >3%, or you have more than a few in a week you should investigate. The most useful samples are the foetus and placenta. Please contact us if you are concerned.
- As many of you will be aware, there are availability issues with Heptavac P Plus this year. However, please do not be tempted just to skip vaccinating, as clostridial diseases are causes of sudden death. Please speak to one of our vets about the alternatives available.
- For small flocks, we will be splitting bottles of Bravoxin (a multivalent clostridial vaccine) and Ovipast (a pasteurilla vaccine) on 22nd January and 19th February. Administering Bravoxin and Ovipast on the same day is very similar to a booster dose of Heptavac P Plus. Please ring the office to book your doses. N.B. Once broached vaccines need to be used within 8 hrs, so you must administer these doses on the day.

Sheep and Goats



Dairy



Betamox is temporarily out of stock due to a previous batch failure. We are expecting an allocation imminently. In the meantime we have Vtrimoxin LA in stock which contains the same antibiotic (amoxicillin) but is administered every 48 hours. This carries a 72h milk withdrawal and an 18d meat withhold. Please speak with your routine vet if you would like to discuss other options.

Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is a serious bacterial disease that affects cattle and can have a significant impact on your herd's health and productivity.

What is Leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is caused by the Leptospira bacteria, which can infect cattle through exposure to contaminated water, soil, or other animals' urine. It is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can also be transmitted to humans, posing a potential public health risk.

Cattle infected with leptospirosis may show symptoms such as:

- Reduced milk production
- Decreased fertility in both bulls and cows
- Abortion in pregnant cows
- General signs of illness like fever, lethargy, and loss of appetite
- Weak calves or stillbirths

How Leptospirosis Spreads

The disease spreads through contact with urine from infected animals, contaminated water sources, or soil. Infected animals may not always show symptoms but can still spread the bacteria, making control efforts challenging.

Why Vaccinate? Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to protect your herd from leptospirosis:

- 1) Prevents Loss of Productivity - By preventing leptospirosis, vaccination helps maintain high milk yields and fertility rates. It also reduces the risk of abortions.
- 2) Reduces the Risk of Transmission - Vaccinating your herd can help reduce the risk of leptospirosis transmission to other animals and even to you or your workers. Since leptospirosis is a zoonotic disease, taking preventive measures can safeguard both your animals and your farm staff.
- 3) Protects Your Bottom Line - The costs associated with a leptospirosis outbreak—such as veterinary treatments, reduced milk production, and animal deaths—can add up quickly. By investing in vaccination, you are safeguarding your herd's health and your financial stability.

Vaccination Options For the past few years we have been using Spirovac as a very effective vaccine to provide leptospirosis protection. Cover is provided by administering a starter course (typically in bulling heifers) of 2 doses 4-6 weeks apart followed by an annual booster.

There have been ongoing issues with Spirovac availability which means that we sometimes import a vaccine called Leptavoid H. While this is not licensed to boost Spirovac, most use it interchangeably with good scientific evidence that one vaccine should boost the other. We have received an allocation of Spirovac for February with more hoped for in March. If you would like to order yours and have not already spoken to one of the vets, ring the office on 01491 651479.

Bluetongue Awareness

Latest news is that despite us now being in the seasonal vector low period (SVLP), there continue to be new cases of bluetongue within the restriction zones. There are now 201 confirmed cases across England & Wales.

It is important to remain vigilant, especially around suspected cattle infertility, stillbirths and neurological symptoms in neonatal calves. This may include blindness, stargazing and hydrocephaly. Whilst such congenital neurological signs can result from other diseases (for example, Schmallenberg/BVD) if you suspect any of these signs please report them as soon as possible. Please give us a call if you have any concerns or call the BTV hotline: 024 7771 0386.



Cattle



With calving fast approaching across many suckler herds the following key points can be useful reminders:

Create a suitable calving environment: Ensure the calving area is clean, dry, and well-ventilated to reduce disease risks like scour.

Monitor body condition: Aim for a Body Condition Score (BCS) of 2.5-3 to support healthy calving and lactation. Although it may be too late to take action to change body condition now diets can be tweaked to maintain the status quo.

Provide balanced nutrition: Feed a diet that meets late-pregnancy energy, protein, and mineral needs, with a focus on magnesium and calcium. Metabolic profiles can be a really useful tool – taking blood from 5-6 cows within 14 days of calving can give a really good indicator as to what the cows think of their diet. Remember that if supplementing water with magnesium chloride then to aim for 40g per cow per day. In these situations take care not to over supplement as it can make the water very bitter.

Prepare a calving kit: Include gloves, ropes, lubricant, disinfectant, calving jack, ensure you can safely restrain a calving cow for assistance.

Pigs

The early days of a piglet's life are critical. Providing optimal care during this period helps improve survival rates, reduce disease risk, and lay the foundation for healthy, productive pigs down the line. Here's a guide to the best practices in piglet care:

- 1) Ensure Proper Colostrum Intake
 - Colostrum is rich in maternal antibodies to provide immunity and develop gut health
 - Improves early survival rates
 - High nutrient content promotes early growth
- 2) Maintaining Optimal Piglet Temperature
 - Provide adequate warmth: Ensure that piglets are kept in a warm environment, ideally between 35-37°C (95-99°F) in the first few days of life. Use heat lamps, radiant heaters, or piglet mats to help maintain warmth in the farrowing area.
 - Prevent drafts: Ensure there are no drafts in the farrowing pens, as this can lead to chilling.
 - Warm the environment gradually: As piglets grow and become more capable of regulating their body temperature, you can gradually reduce the temperature to around 28-30°C (82-86°F) at the time of weaning.
- 3) Umbilical Care and Hygiene - proper care of the umbilical cord is essential to prevent infections that can spread to other parts of the body.
 - Cut and disinfect the umbilical cord: If the cord is long or risks dragging in dirty bedding, it should be cut. Use clean, sharp scissors, and disinfect the area with iodine or another antiseptic to prevent infection.
 - Maintain clean farrowing pens: Keeping the pen clean and dry reduces the risk of contamination and infection for both the sow and piglets. Clean pens between each farrowing and regularly replace bedding.
- 4) Providing Early Socialization - socialization helps piglets adapt to their environment and ensures better health and growth as they transition to weaning and group housing.
 - Promote group interaction: As piglets get older, allow them to interact with other piglets in the same litter. Gradually exposing them to other litters can help reduce stress during the weaning process.
 - Minimize stress: Avoid unnecessary handling or environmental changes during the first few days of life to prevent unnecessary stress, which can negatively affect growth and health.
- 5) Preparing for Weaning - the weaning process is a critical transition for piglets, and how well it is managed can greatly impact post-weaning performance.
 - Weaning age: Aim for weaning piglets at around 21-28 days of age. This is an ideal time to ensure they are weaned without significant negative effects on their health and development.
 - Weaning diet: Start introducing solid food early (about 3 weeks) so that piglets are accustomed to eating solid feed before weaning. Use a high-quality starter feed that is easy to digest and nutritionally balanced.
 - Minimize stress during weaning: Ensure the weaning environment is calm and stress-free. Provide a smooth transition by maintaining familiar conditions and reducing abrupt changes in their environment.



If you need any advice or support, please give us a call!

Reminder - Veterinary Attestations!

With the scheme running for a year now many veterinary attestations / VAN's will be expiring over the next month. Please get in contact with the practice if yours will need an update. A VAN is required for livestock going to slaughter as their animal by-products may be exported to the EU. If you are farm assured by one of the bit.ly/GOV-qualifying-schemes then your membership number will suffice. If you have an AHWP Vet Review in place then this will also count. Give us a call if you have any questions.



Upcoming Workshops

Lambing Workshop

10th February or 10th March

1000 - 1300, Larkmead Vets Cholsey

All sheep farmers and stockpersons are invited to attend this workshop on the essentials of lambing. We will cover:

Pre lambing preparation

Pre- Lambing complications

Discussion on lambing techniques and any problems that may arise during lambing

Basics of normal lambing

Timings

When to call the vet

How to correct standard problems

Post Lambing care of Ewe and Lambs

Common problems with the new born lamb

£50 per person (50% discount for health club members), lunch provided.

Medicine Updates

- Betamox RTU 100ml- stock expected soon
- Bovalto respi I/N - 5d available, 10d OoS
- Closamectin Pour On 500ml - OoS
- Gletvax 20d- On allocation
- Heptavac 50ml- No date (let us know if you are waiting for this)
- Heptavac 100ml- No further stock until Feb
- Heptavac 250ml- OoS till end of Feb
- Heptavac 500ml- OoS till early Feb

Mastering Medicines

7th March

1000 - 1300, Larkmead Vets Cholsey

Farm Assurance Guidelines recommend that at least one member of each farm team has undertaken training and holds a certificate in administering medicines. This workshop will: Improve knowledge of different medicines available on farm and improve decision making

Allow you to safely administer medicines to animals under your care

Record medicine use in accordance with legislation

Store and maintain medicines on farm in accordance with legislation and farm assurance requirements.

Describe the difference between vaccines and treatments and the different legislative classes including antibiotics

Describe the basic classes of anthelmintics and the need for veterinary or SQP guidance on their use

Understand the actions of an NSAID and when they should be used

Understand the responsibility of those administering medicines to farm animals

Certificate of attendance provided (£75 per person). Available to all dairy, beef and sheep farmers.



- Lincject/Lincocin - OoS
- Optivac P Plus (100ml/500ml) - Expected mid Feb
- Spotinor 250ml- Not due back this season
- Suvaxyn MH One - On allocation (then potentially OoS till May 25)
- Synulox 100ml Inj- End of 2025
- Spirovac 25d - On allocation until May/June

Please note that all bit.ly links are case sensitive