

Vet's Viewpoint - Izzy



The rare few days of sunshine, the daffodil heads blooming and the increase in lambing and calving calls in the diary give the telltale signs that spring is just around the corner. For lots of us this can be a very rewarding time of year; seeing live lambs and calves suckling from their mums after a tricky birth, to then seeing them out and about in the fields as we drive from call to call.

This time of year, however, can see a rise in cases of grass staggers (hypomagnesaemia). During spring, the lush pastures can be low in fibre and result in the cow being unable to absorb enough magnesium as the forage moves quickly through the gut. Grass can also be low in magnesium available to the cow if it contains high levels of potassium or ammonia, due to the use of potash or nitrogenous fertilisers on the pasture.

Cases of grass staggers are commonly seen in lactating beef cows post calving and fast growing youngstock at pasture. The onset of signs can be sudden and include muscle twitching, staggering/ataxia, sensitivity to light/touch, which can progress quickly to seizures and death. These cases are emergencies and require prompt treatment to control the seizures and increase the magnesium levels. If you have a bottle of warmed calcium/magnesium available, you can administer this slowly while you wait for the vet to arrive.

Prevention is always better than firefighting and options to supplement magnesium include magnesium chloride in the drinking water, intraruminal magnesium boluses for prolonged release during high-risk periods, or adding magnesium powder to the pasture. Avoiding potash application to pastures in the spring can also reduce the risk.

If you have any concerns or want to discuss prevention strategies further, please do give us a call.

- Worming all ewes pre-lambing is usually unnecessary (most single-bearing ewes and fitter twin-bearing ewes will not require worming) and is a major driver of the development of wormer resistance in worms. It is best to submit faecal samples from your ewes (10 samples per group i.e. singles, twins, triplets) to us for pooled worm egg counts to determine the need to treat. About a fortnight prior to lambing is a good time point.
- 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.
- Remember that ewes with twin lamb disease are best treated with a single injection of Metacam alongside Ewe Go (100-120 ml twice on day 1, 60-80 ml twice a day days 2-4), and being offered a range of palatable feeds.
- Ensuring that lambs get enough colostrum is vital to protect them from infectious diseases in early life. The ewe's own colostrum is usually best, followed by colostrum from another ewe from the farm. If you are using powdered supplements, remember to give more to compensate for the lower antibody concentration. Please speak to a vet for more advice, or to measure your ewe's colostrum quality, or to blood sample your lambs to check they are getting enough.
- With the weather warming up, the period of low midge activity is drawing to an end, which means we are likely to see the return of Bluetongue-3 this summer. Vaccination of sheep prior to the period of greatest risk is the best way (currently) of reducing potential losses due to BTV-3 infection. There is information here: bit.ly/SVS-BTV3-guidance and a good way of assessing your BTV-3 risk here: bit.ly/BTV3-Vaccination-Options
- GOATS: The Goat Veterinary Society is currently running a questionnaire on disbudding. They want responses from farmers as well as vets, so please complete it (it is not long): bit.ly/goats25

Sheep and Goats



Cattle

We have been busy running AHWP (Animal Health and Welfare Pathway) Vet visits recently so this month we are taking the opportunity to remind everyone of the potential benefits available to beef farmers. As part of the government's Animal Health and Welfare Pathway (AHWP), beef farmers can now benefit from fully funded annual veterinary visits. These visits are designed to improve herd health, productivity, and sustainability. Here's what you need to know about the process and follow-up testing.

1. The Vet Visit

During the AHWP vet visit, we will conduct a comprehensive health and welfare review of your herd. We will discuss current herd performance, identify potential risks, and develop a tailored health plan to address any concerns. Blood samples will also need to be taken for BVD testing. The health plan will comply with both Red Tractor and AHWP requirements. Defra funding available for this is part is £522.

2. Follow-Up Testing

Following the initial vet visit, targeted testing may be recommended to confirm herd health status and prevent future issues. Defra funding available for this part is £837 for a follow-up with a BVD persistently infected (PI) hunt or £215 for a follow up without a PI hunt. The following up testing needs to happen within 10 months of the initial review.

It is easy to apply for funding online - visit bit.ly/GOV-Farmers. Once you have your IAHW agreement number let us know and we can book your visit.

Bluetongue Awareness

The total number of BTV-3 cases in GB (24-25) is 221 and all the latest cases have been within restriction zones. There has been 1 confirmed case of BTV-12 (24-25) in England.

We are now in a seasonally vector low period meaning the risk of transmission is low. As we are still largely within a restricted zone, please ensure you book your Bluetongue Pre-movement tests in advance so we can be sure to accommodate them.





Dairy

Red tractor rule changes:

Don't forget that, from February 2025, at least one person on the farm needs to have completed a mastering medicines course within the last 5 years. This means that certificates are starting to lapse. We are running mastering medicines courses as soon as we have enough interest for a full one so please register with the office.

If it is more convenient, we can arrange to run a whole team course on your farm to get everybody up-to-date. If this is something you would like to arrange, speak to your routine vet.

Tuberculosis (TB) in Pigs

Although relatively rare, we have had a couple of clinical cases of TB diagnosed in pigs recently. The disease is caused by *Mycobacterium bovis*, which primarily affects cattle but can affect other mammals.

In pigs, it is known that more cases are found in TB 'hot spots' where levels of bTB in the wildlife and cattle in the area are thought to be high. Pigs can be infected by direct contact with infected cattle but this rarely occurs. Instead, the most likely route of infection is from infected badgers. Their urine or saliva/mucus can contaminate feed, water and bedding. The key to reducing the risk is by trying to stop infected badgers from having access to your pigs or their environment, with good attention to fencing / feed storage and trough accessibility.

Pigs are considered 'dead-end' hosts which means if infected there is a low risk of onward transmission from pig to pig. Clinical signs (weight loss, coughing) are rarely seen, with most cases being picked up at the slaughter house or on post mortem. TB is notifiable so any suspect cases will be tested and the unit placed under restriction until APHA are satisfied that the unit is clear.



Pigs

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

Mastering Medicines

30th April

1000 - 1300, Larkmead Vets, Cholsey

Farm Assurance Guidelines recommend that at least one member of each farm team has undertaken training (within the last 5 years) 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. Please register interest with the office: farm@larkmead.co.uk

Medicine Updates

- Betamox RTU 100ml- very limited stock
- Closamectin Pour On 500ml - OoS
- Gletvac 10d- OOS, 20d available
- Heptavac 50ml- No date (let us know if you are waiting)
- Heptavac 100ml- Very limited stock
- Heptavac 250ml- OOS no date
- Heptavac 500ml- Limited stock
- Ovivac P Plus (100ml/500ml) – OOS no date
- Spotinor 250ml- Not due back this season
- Suvaxyn MH One – Limited stock available
- Synulox 100ml Inj- OOS until end of 2025
- Spirovac 25d/ Leptavoid - On allocation until May/June

We are running a Heptavac split day on the 19th of March, commencing at 0900. Please contact the farm office if you'd like to reserve dose(s). They will need to be administered on the same day as collection due to the bottle being broached.

Please note that all bit.ly links are case sensitive

