



## Schmallenberg Update

One of the most common topics of conversation with our farming clients at the moment is Schmallenberg virus. I recently attended a meeting in Carmarthen where some of the most up to date information was presented, and some interesting facts came to light. From discussion in the room it appeared that fewer lambing flocks were experiencing SBV in February, compared to those lambing before Christmas and early into the New Year. This can be explained in two ways. Firstly, as the tupping season progressed midge activity is likely to have reduced, and secondly, many of the ewes tupped later on would have already been exposed to the virus, before they got pregnant. It is estimated that foetal deformities appear if the foetus is exposed to the virus between days 28 to 52 of pregnancy in sheep and days 62 to 110 in cattle. Earlier this month we saw the first calves affected with deformities in this area, and a similar pattern was reported by vets from south and west Wales. Due to their longer pregnancy it is likely that we will see deformities in calves through until April, and possibly even later. Last year deformed lambs were born in May, so the ewes had been bitten by midges and infected in December or January, which leads us to conclude that last year there was no midge-free period.

The deformities seen are caused by lack of movement in the foetus during pregnancy due to damage to the motor nerves. As well as the typical bent limbs and deformed jaws, cloudy eyes, fluid in the brain and narrowed spinal cords have been reported. The sensory nerves are not affected, and welfare must be considered when delivering live lambs or calves with deformities. The virus has been detected in semen in 11 out of 94 bulls tested, for at least 40 days after infection. The AHVLA is doing more investigation work into this important area.

The proportion of animals likely to be infected in a UK sheep flock is unknown, but in Holland it was shown to be approximately 90 %. We have tested bulk milk antibodies in dairy herds throughout our practice, and all have shown high positive results. However this does not tell us what proportion of the herd had been exposed. Small scale studies in the Midlands have shown that only 25% of an indoor dairy herd had been exposed, compared to 76% of an outdoor dairy herd 6 miles away. Once a breeding animal is exposed to the virus, it develops antibodies which we know protect it for at least a year, so a ewe exposed during pregnancy this year will not have a deformed lamb next year. As time goes on we will gather more information as to how long this immunity lasts, and this will help us to decide how and when to use the vaccine which is currently being developed.

## Metacam for Dehorning

In recent years there have been major advances in our understanding of pain in farm animals which has led to changes in the way we approach painful conditions and procedures. The acute pain of dehorning is controlled by using local anaesthetic, however the longer term pain that outlasts this anaesthesia can have a significant adverse impact on calf health and welfare. Research has shown that the pain associated with dehorning lasts up to 44 hours - and this is where the long acting NSAID, Metacam for Cattle - now licensed to control the pain associated with dehorning - can be used to bridge the gap. The fact that the analgesic effect of Metacam has been shown to last up to three days, means that it can provide pain relief ideally suited for calves undergoing dehorning.

Research has shown the additional benefits of using Metacam when dehorning include:

- Reduced stress responses – heart rate, respiratory rate and cortisol levels

- Reduced sensitivity to pain in the dehorned area – positive impact on suckling behaviour
- Reduced frequency of pain related behaviour – less ear flicking and head shaking
- Increased feed intake – significantly **more weight gain** with Metacam in the **10 days** post dehorning.

A dose of Metacam for a 50 kg calf costs £1.12 (with PAT discount). This cost is likely to be offset by the improved weight gain and reduced risk of pneumonia after dehorning.

## Once a day Feeding of Calves

The AHVLA has reported an increased number of calves submitted for post mortem which have been diagnosed with abomasal ulcers and bloat. The common factor seems to be that these calves have been fed artificial milk once daily. At present there are several milk powders for sale that are marketed as being suitable for once daily feeding from a few days of age. However, **UK laws** state that all **calves must be fed at least twice daily** and in the first month of life this should be a milk feed, as they will not be eating sufficient fibre or concentrate for this to make up a feed. Research has shown that feeding once daily reduces the immune response and can increase the risk of abomasal ulceration. In summary, it is illegal to feed calves under four weeks of age less than twice daily with liquid milk replacer. Preferably they should be fed from a teat rather than a bucket, to allow the oesophageal groove to function, so that milk does not get into the rumen, where it would ferment and cause digestive upsets.

## New Aggers Product Off Feed

For those of you who are familiar with drenching your cows with fluids when they are ill, there is now an additional product in the Aggers range which we think will be very useful. As the name suggests it is formulated to stimulate the appetite and promote rumen function in cows which are inappetent. The sachets cost £9.24 +VAT (pay at time price). If you need any further information about which of these products to use on which cows, please ask one of the vets.

## Requests from the Office

In order to speed up waiting times at the desk please could you ring in advance to place large drugs orders. This will enable us to make sure that we have everything that you need and that it is ready for you to collect. Also, at this busy time of year it would help us if you avoided the Monday morning rush when ringing to book TB tests. This will help us to ensure that any emergencies are dealt with as quickly as possible,

## Staff News

Last Friday was Debbie Hazelwood's last day at work with us. She has worked for the farm department for 6 and a half years but she has decided to give up the commuting and has various plans for her future closer to home (including using her dog grooming skills). We wish her every success for the future and we will all miss her sterling work on TB administration. From now on Tracy will be taking on the role of TB co-ordinator, so please ask for Tracy if you have TB matters to discuss. Gabriel, our new TB tester, has now started with us, so you may meet him in the near future carrying out TB tests on your farm.

Vicki has bought a house in the locality. We hope this means that she likes us and will be staying in the area for some time (or we are paying her too much - Rob) Jane is very pleased to report that her new vehicle was not the first to have to visit the garage having been restyled by its driver. Rob's van has been in at least once (something to do with a gatepost I think), so for all of you who had money on it – sorry you lost it this time.