



**Grass Staggers** Magnesium deficiency, or grass staggers, is a stress related condition which can be brought on by factors such as cold, wet weather.

Current temperatures have ensured that the spring grass flush has yet to start, but very wet pastures mean that when temperatures do improve, grass will grow rapidly. Staggers is still a significant cause of death in cattle and sheep during the spring period and you cannot afford to lose valuable livestock as a result of this preventable disease. Given this, **preventative strategies** must be employed to minimise the risk. The major points to consider for **cattle** are as follows:

1. Provide magnesium to cattle prior to the spring grass flush.
2. Try and bring animals in at night for the first week, especially in cold, wet and windy weather.
3. Reduce silage and any concentrate feeding gradually in the run-up to turn-out.
4. Delay the use of potassium-rich fertilisers until later in the year.
5. Watch out for poor weather – staggers cases increase dramatically on wet, windy days and frosty nights.
6. Consider a belt and braces approach to magnesium supplementation – use a bolus and free access products.

An effective means of giving each individual animal a guaranteed supply of magnesium during the high risk period is by using boluses such as Rumbul magnesium bullets. These boluses are given 2-3 days prior to turn-out. The boluses last 28 days and will provide a consistent supply of magnesium to cattle..

The major points to consider for **ewes** are as follows:

1. Provide magnesium to ewes prior to the spring grass flush.
2. If lambing indoors, supplement with magnesium prior to turn-out.
3. If lambing outdoors, supplement to coincide with the period 2-6 weeks post lambing.
4. Try and keep ewes with lambs aged 2-6 weeks on the same pasture – moving them can trigger staggers.
5. Delay the use of potassium rich fertilisers until later in the year.
6. Watch out for poor weather – staggers cases increase dramatically on wet, windy days and frosty nights.
7. Consider a belt and braces approach to magnesium supplementation – use a bolus and free access products.

Rumbul magnesium bullets are also available for sheep. These boluses are given 2-3 days prior to turn-out or to coincide with the period 2-6 weeks post lambing. The boluses last 21 days.

Other methods of supplementation include adding magnesium sulphate in the water, but all water sources must be treated; adding magnesium to the concentrate feed; using high magnesium minerals on the feed; or providing free access magnesium blocks. The blocks are popular but we have reservation about them as not all individual animals will eat blocks, so losses can still occur.

**New Product for Ketosis Prevention in Dairy Cows – Kexxtone** We will shortly be stocking a new product called Kexxtone which is designed to be used in cows at risk of ketosis. It consists of a bolus which is given to dry cows approximately 20 days before they calve. The contents of the bolus help the cow to make better use of the feed by acting on the rumen flora. In order to make the best use of this product we need to identify the cows most at risk of ketosis by looking at condition scores, previous individual cow history and the current energy state of the herd. Regular monitoring of the freshly calved cows will help us to do this, and we now have some milk test strips called Ketostix, as well as the blood ketone meters to help us do this. We will discuss this at a routine visit on your farm in the near future. In the meantime, if you want more information please speak to one of the vets.

## Treatment of Hypothermic Lambs

As the current cold snap continues I thought I would repeat some information we sent out last year on how to deal with hypothermic lambs.

Hypothermia is thought to account for around 40% of all lamb deaths. The normal temperature in a lamb is 38.5-40°C (101.5-104°F). When the temperature falls below 37°C (99°F) the lamb will lose the suck reflex and will need assistance to survive. Generally when lambs are born they have enough energy to survive for around five hours, if death occurs at this stage it will be due to excessive heat loss. If death occurs after this stage it will be due to a combination of heat loss and low energy levels.

- **Mild/Moderate Hypothermia.** The lamb's temperature will be between 38.5-40°C (101.5-104°F) and the animal will be dull, weak and just able to suck. The lamb should be fed warm colostrum via a teat or stomach tube, dried and returned to its' mother preferably in a dry, draught free pen.
- **Severe Hypothermia.** The lamb's body temperature will be below 37°C (99°F), and will be dull, empty-looking with an arched back and unable to suck. It will quickly become recumbent and if untreated will die.
- **Treatment:** will depend on the age of the lamb. If the animal is over five hours old it should be considered to have low energy levels (hypoglycaemia) as well as hypothermia. It is essential that these cases are given an injection of 20% glucose into the abdomen (intra-peritoneal) before warming to reduce the risk of death due to low energy levels.

### Lambs Less Than Five Hours Old

Dry thoroughly, and warm until body temperature is over 37°C (99°F). Feed with warm colostrum via a stomach tube. Warm again until temperature is 39°C (103°F). Return the lamb to its mother preferably in a dry, draught -free pen and observe progress.

### Lambs More Than Five Hours Old

Inject into the lambs' abdomen 20% glucose solution at a rate of 5-10ml/kg. Typically 30ml for an average sized lamb. A 20% glucose solution can be made by mixing 400ml of 40% glucose (costing £4.87) with 400ml of boiled water (£0.30 for an average sized lamb). To give the injection into the abdomen the lamb should be suspended vertically by holding the front legs. A 19 gauge 1 inch needle is introduced through the body wall approximately 1 inch to the side and 1 inch below the navel/umbilical cord. The needle should be pointed towards the lambs back legs. Once the needle has been carefully inserted the warmed 20% glucose should be slowly injected using a clean 50ml syringe. Dry the lamb thoroughly and warm until temperature is above 37°C (99°F). Feed with warm colostrum via a stomach tube. Warm again until temperature is 39°C (103°F). Return the lamb to its mother, preferably in a dry, draught-free pen and observe progress.

**Staff News** In the past few weeks Claire Parsons has been working in the office to help us out until our new member of staff arrives. She has taken to the job like a duck to water, and we are very grateful for her hard work during this busy period.

We are looking forwards to welcoming Brigitte Smith, our new member of office staff, who will be starting next Monday. Brigitte is a local lady with a farming background, who has an interest in poultry and training working dogs.