

## Farm First Newsletter April 2015

**Lamb Nutrition** For the first four weeks of age, lamb growth is virtually 100% dependent on the ewe's milk production. A key component of milk's role is its provision of high quality protein that bypasses the rumen. Lowland cross-bred lambs grazing alongside their mothers require that protein until they are around 35 kg live weight. It is only thereafter that pasture provides enough protein in relation to energy to meet the growing lamb's needs. So it is important to maintain the ewe's nutrition so she can meet this requirement.

The purpose of creep feeding is to boost the suckling lamb's nutrient intake. Reasons include: grass supplies are limited and to try and maintain growth rates, to ensure lambs achieve market weight and condition before a likely fall in selling price, to reduce the risk of gastro-intestinal parasite infections to allow increased stocking density.

If there is a plentiful supply of good grass available (sward height >5cm), creep feeding will not improve performance but will add to costs. Forward creep grazing, where lambs are given access to the best grazing before the ewes, can be used to prevent the need for creep feeding. On restricted grazing, lambs with limited creep feeding will gain on average an extra 1kg live weight for every 5-6 kg of creep feed compared to unsupplemented lambs. Lambs with ad lib access can reach intakes of over 1kg per head per day. A home-mixed ration based on whole barley + 15% soya bean meal is suitable (ME = 12.5 MJ/kg DM). For long-term feeding a mineral suitable for lambs (no phosphorus, magnesium or copper added) should be included at a rate of 2.5%.

**Worms and Cocci in Lambs** Both nematodirus and coccidiosis are causes of scour and death in young lambs. The SCOPS nematodirus warning system has been updated this week to say that all areas of Wales, all of Northern Ireland, South West, South East and Eastern England have now joined Devon and Somerset in the 'at risk' category. This means producers can expect a peak hatch in these areas in 10-14 days depending on weather. Lambs born in February/early March may be at risk, particularly on south-facing pastures if the weather suddenly warms up. We urge all clients to regularly check for updates at [www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk).

Coccidiosis is most often seen in 3-8 week-old lambs but can occur up to 6 months of age. Lambs are usually protected in the first few weeks of life by colostral antibodies. The period between infection of an animal with oocysts and them shedding oocysts themselves, is 2-3 weeks. Early-born lambs are often exposed to low numbers of oocysts shed by ewes and, although not clinically affected themselves, they shed higher numbers and are an important source of infective oocysts to those lambs born later on. In situations of high stocking densities, stressed lambs are exposed to a high environment level and are more likely to succumb to the disease. Clinical disease can follow a stressful event such as adverse weather, weaning or sudden dietary change.

Diagnosis of coccidiosis is most commonly based upon history (age of lambs and intensive rearing system) and clinical signs. Faecal egg counts are useful to rule out worms as the cause of scour, but high faecal Eimeria oocyst counts alone do not confirm the diagnosis. Oocyst counts of up to 100,000 cysts/gram of faeces have been found in healthy 8-12 week old lambs, as there are several strains of sheep cocci which do not cause disease. Harmful species can be identified by specialist laboratories. If you are concerned about either of these diseases on your lambs please speak to a vet to discuss diagnosis and treatment.

**Suckler Cow Fertility** In beef cows the interval from calving to first ovulation (or postpartum interval), is affected by nutrition and by the suckling effect of the calf. It is important for a suckler cow to come into oestrus and ovulate reasonably quickly after calving so that she can successfully conceive next year's calf. The suckling effect is the biggest determinant of this interval, comprising: (i) physical contact and (ii) maternal bonding between cow and calf. Restricted suckling and calf isolation induce a rapid resumption of oestrous cycles.

Nutrition pre calving is the next most important determinant of the postpartum interval. Cows that calve in poor body condition have a longer interval than cows that calve in good body condition. Increasing the level of nutrition after calving has only a limited effect in shortening the postpartum interval. This is one reason why it is important to get your cows in the right condition for calving, not to try and play catch up afterwards.

A recent research experiment investigated the effect of suckling frequency on sixty spring calving beef cows.. After calving the cows and calves were turned out to pasture and the calves had full access to their dams up until day 35 postpartum, at which time they were allocated to one of three suckling treatments, 1) ad lib suckling, where calves continued to have full access to cows, 2) twice daily suckling, where suckling was restricted to twice-a-day, or 3) a once a day period of suckling.

When suckling was restricted to either once or twice daily there was a significant decrease in the length of the postpartum interval compared to cows suckled ad lib. Surprisingly, suckling restriction had no detrimental effect on calf performance.

Some of you may have noticed this effect when cows and calves are temporarily separated for a period of a few days when for example cleaning sheds out. Farmers have commented that a lot of cows seem to come bulling when the cows and calves are separated for a periods over a few days. If you feel that this practice maybe possible in your system and you could use it to tighten calving intervals for your suckler cows, please feel free to give us a ring to discuss.

**Fit to Travel Certificates** Please note that if you need a certificate for an animal to say that it is fit to travel to a slaughter house, the vet needs to see the animal within 24 hours of it travelling in order to write a valid certificate.

**Staff News** We are pleased to announce that Caroline Barnes has joined us and will be working on reception in the office, mainly in the mornings. Caroline has worked in a mixed veterinary practice in Cornwall in the past and has a lot of experience in helping with operations (mainly with horses). She does own a horse which means that the horse-owning members of staff now outnumber the non-horse owners (sorry Rob – we don't talk about them ALL the time).

**Meeting** A specialist dairy health event for Welsh farmers will be held at Nantyffin Hotel, Llandissilio, SA66 7SU on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2015. 11am- 3pm (lunch provided). Topics under discussion will include: What's new in mastitis, control of clinical mastitis, particularly environmental mastitis and practical control of cell counts. Speakers Peter Edmondson, Shepton Vets and James Breen, QMMS. If you would like to attend please contact Dylan Jones on 01554 748570 or email [Dylan.jones@colegsirgar.ac.uk](mailto:Dylan.jones@colegsirgar.ac.uk) to confirm your place.

## **THE RUGBY LOVING HUSBAND**

A man had two of the best tickets for the Rugby World Cup Final.

As he sits down, another man comes along and asks if anyone is sitting in the seat next to him..

"No", he says, "the seat is empty."

"This is incredible!" said the man, "who in their right mind would have a seat like this for the Rugby Cup Final, the biggest sporting event of the rugby world and not use it?"

He says, "Well, actually, the seat belongs to me.

My wife was supposed to come with me, but she passed away.

This is the first Cup Final we haven't been to together since we got married."

"Oh... I'm sorry to hear that. That's terrible.

I guess you couldn't find someone else, a friend or relative or even a neighbour to take the seat?"

The man shakes his head.. ..

"No. They're all at the funeral.

