

Farm First Newsletter June 2015

Purchasing a Bull This can be an expensive process, but the value that he brings to your herd can be worth far more than his initial cost. It is important to consider what you want from your bull before choosing him, and once you have chosen, to ensure that he is healthy and fit for purpose. A fertile bull should be able to get 90% of 50 breeding cows in calf within 9 weeks. A subfertile, infertile or sterile bull will not achieve this and will result in costly extensions to calving interval and empty cows. Ask us to perform a pre-purchase examination. This usually consists of a thorough physical examination, including assessment of internal and external, sex organs, and a semen test. This should be performed within a few weeks of the start of breeding to reduce the risk of a change of status. Cost is £88 + vat (and £66 + vat for each additional bull). It is essential that any bull bought should have good conformation, particularly good legs and feet. Where possible make sure you watch the animal walk on concrete to ensure he walks correctly and he has good feet (this can be hidden in a well bedded pen!).

Try to avoid bringing in disease. Establish from the vendor their Johnes, BVD, Leptospirosis and IBR status. If this information is unavailable then test the bull prior to introduction to the herd. Quarantine your bull on arrival and treat him for internal and external parasites; fluke, worms and lice, and observe for any signs of disease. Find out the diet that the bull has been fed to ensure as smooth a transition as possible and promote rumen health.

Estimated breeding values (EBVs) are a measure of the genetic potential of a given sire. There are a number of traits which are measured and some results are combined to given indices to meet specific breeding objectives. EBVs are designed to remove the effect of nutrition, management and environment to give a best estimate of genetic performance of a bull. Your production system will govern which traits you should be identifying as important.

For instance, beef producers selling progeny at weaning, then *Calving Ease (direct)*, *Birth Weight*, *Muscle Area* and *200 Day Growth* would be important. For those producers finishing stock, *400 Day Weight* is paramount and *Fat Depth* must be considered. Those breeding their own replacements need to also consider *Calving Ease of Daughters*, *200 Day Milk*, and *Scrotal Circumference*. Scrotal circumference of the bull is closely related to the fertility of daughters and they will reach puberty earlier.

For dairy herds considering a beef bull to maximise the value of surplus calves, looking at EBVs is also important. Priorities for *Calving Ease*, *Low Birth Weights*, and *Shorter Gestation (Calving Value)* are important to reduce costs associated with difficult calving and also to reduce calving interval. In addition if the progeny are to be sold as young calves then 200 day weight is also important

Startect – a new class of sheep wormer We held a very well-attended meeting last month to inform our clients about this new class of wormer, which we think should be incorporated into your flock parasite control plans. Startect is a dual action wormer and it treats and controls of a broad range of susceptible adult and immature gastrointestinal nematodes of sheep, including those resistant to levamisole, benzimidazoles, macrocyclic lactones and closantel. Knockout drenching is the substitution of one routine lamb drench with Startect. Resistant parasites which have survived and accumulated from the preceding drenches are then knocked out by Startect.

Knockout drenching has been shown to delay the onset of resistance to the existing routine drenches used. A Knockout drench can be given to lambs at any time – modelling demonstrates that there is a benefit in delaying anthelmintic resistance whenever the Knockout drench is given.

The greatest benefit is seen when a Knockout drench is given just as conditions become favourable for larval survival and development on pasture. The ideal timing for a Knockout

drench will generally be late summer/early autumn, to prevent an autumn larval peak of resistant parasites on pasture. It can also be used for quarantine drenching of purchased stock. The dose rate is 1ml/5kg, the meat withhold is 14 days and the product costs £75.88 + VAT for 1 litre pack costs and £286.97 (PAT) + vat for 5 litres (approx 30p/lamb).

If you have used Zolvix in previous years, it may be time to consider using this as an alternative this year. If you want more information, please ring us and ask to speak to a vet.

XLVets Sheep Lameness Campaign Sheep farmers across the UK agree that lameness in sheep is the biggest welfare concern to them. Lameness results in pain, which then in turn results in poor body condition, reduced growth rates and an overall reduction in productivity and ultimately PROFITABILITY!! Many studies have been undertaken to look at the cost of lameness and the figures vary from £6.60 to £15 per lame sheep. Currently the prevalence of lameness within UK flocks is 10% and The Farm Animal Welfare Council has set targets for reducing this level to <5% by 2016 and <2% by 2021. These targets may affect Farm Assurance membership in the future.

This summer XLVets are running a “Stand Up to Sheep Lameness” campaign aimed at helping you identify causes of lameness and reduce the incidence of lameness within your flock. We aim to do this by running meetings, on-farm visits and implementing a control plan based on the 5 point plan. This 5 point plan consists of treating lame sheep early (with appropriate treatment), culling chronically affected sheep, avoid spreading the disease during handling, good biosecurity and vaccination. This is general basis for control of lameness but will vary slightly from farm to farm.

If you would be interested in participating in the “Stand Up to Sheep Lameness” campaign or even want to have a chat about lameness in your ewes then please contact us at the surgery. Vicki is our Sheep Lameness “Champion” and is enthusiastic about getting involved to help you reduce your lameness issues.

Calf Castration If you have groups of calves to castrate, please consider getting them cut before they get too big, ideally before 9 months of age. There are several benefits to this. Firstly, the bigger the calves the greater the risk of serious bleeding after castration: secondly, larger calves take longer to castrate and need larger doses of drugs, so it will cost you more, and thirdly, it is easier to restrain smaller calves to reduce the risk of injury to the vet.

Freemartins

When a cow has twin calves, one of which is male and one female, it is very common for the female calf to be infertile (known as a freemartin). We are now able to offer a relatively cheap and rapid test to find out whether the female is a freemartin or not. A simple blood tests costs approx. £60 + VAT (including postage), and results are usually back within 14 days. This information will allow early decisions to be made about whether the animal can be kept for breeding purposes.

The Joke

A 747's flying over the Atlantic when the engines fail and it goes into a tailspin. An air hostess runs into the cockpit, rips off her blouse and screams at the captain, 'please! Make me die feeling like a real woman' So the captain rips of his shirt and says 'iron this'.