Farm First Newsletter November 2013

Ewe Scanning. It is time to consider booking your ewes in for ultrasound scanning which is best carried out at around day 70 of pregnancy and has several benefits. It will identify barren ewes with 100% accuracy, and culling these animals will reduce feed requirements. The number of lambs being carried can be identified with 90 to 95% accuracy, enabling ewes to be grouped and fed according to body condition and litter size. The targets for number of lambs scanned per 100 ewes put to the tup are 195 lambs for a lowland flock, 175 for an upland flock and 116 lambs for a hill flock.

There are many possible reasons for low numbers of lambs seen at scanning time. Management issues to consider include condition score, fertility and numbers of rams, and condition score and nutrition of ewes at tupping time. Poor feeding or body condition before mating increase embryo loss and this year there has been bad weather and a high risk of liver fluke for the sheep to contend with. Feed composition in early pregnancy is important as selenium deficiency and excessive phosphorus both increase embryo loss, as does grazing early pregnant ewes on red clover, kale or rape. Embryo mortality is higher in young ewes, and those subjected to climatic stress, such as heat, high rainfall or cold.

Another common cause of high numbers of barren ewes is infection with the protozoan parasite Toxoplasma gondii. If ewes ingest the infective oocysts in very early pregnancy the foetus will be resorbed and the ewe will appear to be barren.

If you have scanned your ewes and have been disappointed with the results some investigations can be carried out to try to identify the cause. The barren sheep can be blood sampled to look for mineral deficiencies, evidence of exposure to Toxoplasma and also exposure to Schmallenburg virus, another potential cause of infertility in ewes. If you have any concerns on this subject, please contact us at the office on 01873 840167 for further advice.

Mycotoxins – are they a concern? Mycotoxins are often attributed to a whole host of problems on farm. Moulds can potentially grow in any environment where conditions for growth are correct. Some of these moulds can cause disease in their own right, such as mycotic abortion due to *Aspergillus fumigatus* (seen in cows fed mouldy hay). However under certain conditions, moulds can also produce secondary poisonous compounds called mycotoxins.. These compounds are not visible to the naked eye (unlike the moulds themselves), and clamp management , temperature, moisture and insect activity are thought to be the main factors influencing mycotoxin formation. Maize silage, wholecrop and dry silages are most at risk. High doses of mycotoxins may cause well described signs such as liver damage or death, but most cows end up receiving lower doses that cause non-specific signs such as reduced milk yield, increased levels of disease and reduced fertility.

Mycotoxins can potentially affect feed intakes, upset rumen function, reduce nutrient absorption and suppress the immune system. There are no specific tests available that can diagnose mycotoxins within the animal. However there are a number of laboratories that test for mycotoxins in feed. Unfortunately levels of mycotoxins may vary widely within a silage clamp depending on which site is sampled.

If you are suspicious of mycotoxin problems, then the potential options to reduce the effects are: 1) Manage clamp faces to reduce spoilage. Keep the face tight using a shear grab to reduce air exposure, and get across the face quick enough to prevent heating. Do not feed spoiled feed on the “shoulders” of the clamp. 2) Clean out feed troughs daily. 3) If possible, “dilute” out the problem forage by feeding 50:50 with another forage. 4) If possible, do not feed suspect feedstuffs to transition dry cows, fresh calvers and calves (which are at the highest risk of effects). 5) Add a mycotoxin-binder to the diet. There are a number of different products available based on activated charcoal, silicates, complex indigestible carbohydrates or polymers. They are usually incorporated in a mixed ration for a 2 week trial period to see if they have an effect on milk yield, dung consistency, clinical signs etc.

Rotavec and Lactovac Unfortunately we are having problems sourcing both of these vaccines at the moment, due to batch failures in production. If you usually vaccinate your cows with either of these products before calving, the best alternative that we can suggest in the meantime is to give the calves a dose of **Locatim** within the first 6 hours after birth. This product is contains antibodies to rotavirus, coronavirus and E coli, which the calves absorb into their system. One dose costs £13.91 (pay at time) + VAT. Please note that the product may contain antibodies to other diseases, so if your herd has high health status, please talk to a vet before using it.

Good Shed Ventilation – one key aspect to keeping stock healthy Moisture is key, as many viruses and bacteria thrive on droplets of air. Poor building ventilation is often an important factor in the cause of respiratory and mastitis problems. A generous airspace reduces the pathogen challenge per cubic meter of air within the building. Problems in livestock buildings are typically down to imbalances in one or more of these separate factors:

1. Moisture As already discussed, damp conditions support and indeed promote the growth of some species of bacteria. Are there damp slippery floors in areas that should be dry within your stock sheds? Is there condensation staining of the underside of the roof? Are there any leaking water troughs? What is the drainage like in the shed, and within the pens?

2. Fresh Air A lack of fresh air increases:

• survival time of airborne pathogens

• concentration of gaseous emissions.

Is there an ammonia smell in a particular area of your calf or cow shed**? Fresh air kills bugs and it is free: 100% fresh air kills airborne bugs approximately 10 times quicker than that of 50% fresh air.**

3. Air Speed Too much or too little both cause problems. Too much is associated with excessive energy losses, which is particularly important in calf sheds. A draught can result in calves huddling in certain areas of the shed. Excessive energy losses result in lower growth rates. Elimination of draughts to above animal height is required, therefore positioning of air inlets and outlets is key. Too low an air speed results in a lack of fresh air within the building. The massive heat loss needed by high yielding dairy cows should not be overlooked.

A **narrow ridge opening** in many cattle buildings can be the main culprit behind a muggy and damp environment – the heat produced by the housed adult stock warms the surrounding air, which then rises. A narrow ridge prevents this moist air leaving the shed, and so it condenses on the underside of the cold roof and falls as droplets. Many poorly ventilated buildings can be rapidly and inexpensively improved by opening up the ridge or other roof outlets. These practical steps are relatively straightforward, cheap and effective. Do not allow poor ridge outlets to impact on cattle health on your farm. Good housing needs to provide a dry environment with a reasonable supply of fresh air and no draughts. We are able to come and carry out assessments on your buildings using laser measuring equipment and smoke bombs. Please ring us to arrange an appointment and to discuss how Framing Connect can fund 80% of the cost.

Raglan Community First Responders are trying to raise money to buy a defibrillator and resuscitation equipment for their team of volunteers who provide patient care in life threatening 999 calls in advance of the emergency services arrival. By arriving on scene in the critical first few minutes, they can save lives - particularly if a patient stops breathing or is suffering a heart attack. If you would like to give a small donation to support this scheme, please contact David Barrell at David.Barrell@wales.nhs.ukor on 07817 753817.

Joke Spot Dai Farmer got into his Toyota 4 x 4 and drove to the neighbouring farm and knocked at the door. A young boy, Ted, aged about 9, opened the door.

'Is your Dad home?' Dai demanded.
'No, sir, he isn't,' Ted replied. 'He went into town.'
'Well, then,' enquired Dai, 'is your Mum here?'
'No, sir, she isn't here neither. She went into town with Dad.'
'How about your brother? Is he here?'
'He went with Mum and Dad,' explained Ted patiently.
Dai Farmer stood there for a few seconds, shifting from one foot to the other and muttering to himself.

'Is there anything I can do for you?' Ted asked politely. 'I know where all the tools are, if you want to borrow one. Or maybe I could take a message for Dad.' 'Well, it's difficult,' answered Dai uncomfortably, 'I really wanted to talk to your Dad. It's about your brother getting my daughter pregnant.'

Ted considered for a moment, 'You would have to talk to Dad about that,' he finally conceded. 'If it helps you any, I know that he charges £600 for the bull and £60 for the ram, but I really don't know how much he gets for Matthew.'