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**In this issue: Grass staggers, TB testing update, Sheep Parasite Control, Post Lambing Review – Free Flock Check Scheme, Red Mites in Chickens.**

## Grass Staggers

Hypomagnesaemia or ‘grass staggers’ is most commonly seen in lactating cows at grass. It may also be seen in lactating sheep. A typical case would be an older, recently-calved beef cow, but it is also seen in dairy animals, particularly if they aren’t receiving adequate mineral supplementation. Rapidly growing, lush spring grass can have especially low levels of magnesium. Lush grass also has a faster transit through the gut so there is less time for absorption. Cattle and sheep do not store magnesium, so they rely on having a sufficient intake each day. If not enough is ingested and absorbed, then signs of staggers will appear.

The clinical signs include twitching; excitability; staggering gait; seizures; teeth grinding; salivation and sudden death. If one clinical case is diagnosed in a herd/flock, then the chances are that other animals in the group will be sub-clinically affected – this means that they will have depressed feed intakes and milk yields, and they will be more likely to go down with staggers or milk fever.



Staggers is an emergency and affected cows or sheep should be treated rapidly with injections of magnesium and calcium. It is important not to move the animal or over-stimulate it until it has responded to treatment, as there is a high risk of seizures and death.

At risk animals should receive supplementation with magnesium. This can be fed as high-magnesium concentrate feed, or soluble salts may be added to the water supply. Other options are top-dressing the pasture or intraruminal boluses. We are happy to discuss the most appropriate options for your farm.

## TB Testing Update

You have probably heard that there are some changes to the delivery of TB testing from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015. In England, the 'delivery partner' is XL Farmcare, who will manage the testing. However, we will continue to carry out TB testing for our clients as before.

## Worming Ewes at Lambing

Ewes at lambing will have a lower immunity which increases the risk of shedding eggs at pasture, later exposing their lambs. Ewes are treated at lambing to reduce this risk. We advise leaving 10% of the fittest or single ewes untreated to minimise resistance build up.

Treatment choice should be based upon grazing management and Worm Egg Count analysis. Fresh samples can be dropped into the practice and we will discuss worming strategies depending on your individual results and circumstances. If you suspect Anthelmintic Resistance is a problem on your farm, or wish to find out contact us before you submit your Worm Egg Counts to discuss starting a Worm Resistance Investigation.

## Scour and Weight Loss in Grazing Lambs



Conditions are now favourable for two of the most common causes of diarrhoea & ill thrift in lambs: *Nematodirus* and *Coccidiosis*. Both can cause significant levels of mortality as well as production losses associated with an early check prolonging the time it takes to reach market weight. Lambs will be at risk from both parasites if grazing pasture that had lambs on last year.

***Nematodirus*** is an intestinal parasite that causes profuse watery, yellow-green scour. Most losses occur in spring because the temperature conditions are right when lambs start to graze contaminated pasture. Eggs passed by lambs last year will hatch into infective larvae all at once when temp. rise above 10C.

In most seasons the first treatment dose is generally given early-mid May. However, because mean temperatures from December to February have been mild, early observations suggest that late January and February born lambs grazing contaminated pastures, may need drenching now with a white drench.

**Coccidiosis** is a protozoal parasite that quickly causes extreme gut damage. Lambs become infected by eggs that have overwintered at pasture or from older lambs.

To ensure infection is picked up early start collecting fresh faecal samples for egg counts, from lambs 4 weeks of age or older. Submit 10-15 samples to the practice. If found to be positive for Cocci the samples can then be sent for a **Free speciation test** to identify the type of Cocci present (sponsored by Bayer) and a treatment plan can be drawn up.



## Post Lambing Review

We hope everyone has had or is having a successful lambing period but it may be that the number of aborted ewes, barren ewes, sick ewes or sick lambs were higher than you expected or wished for. If this is the case then we can investigate the problem, hopefully identify the cause and importantly prevent the same issues occurring next year.

If you wish to review this year's lambing results please contact us at the practice.

## Barren or Aborted Ewes



If you experienced >2% of ewes aborting or >2% of barren ewes it could be down to an infectious disease. It is not too late to test. We can still sample up to 8 ewes under the Flock Check Testing Scheme to look for exposure to Toxoplasmosis and Enzootic Abortion. The **laboratory fees are free** (by MSD).

## Chickens – Red Mites



With warmer temperatures red mites will be starting to breed and causing problems in hen houses. These blood sucking ectoparasites also infest turkeys, causing intense irritation, loss of condition, egg drop and in extreme cases anaemia.

The mites will live in the house during the day. It is important to treat both the birds and the house. Ivermectin 1% spot-on or Chicken Vet Mite Powder and Chicken Vet poultry shield are recommended. The new biological control method; "Predator Mites" is now available – please contact us for further information.

**Congratulations!!!** to Jen Baker and her husband on the arrival of their new baby girl!

