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Monitoring Nutritional Status in Dairy Cows

Fertility in dairy cows is heavily influenced by energy intake. Symptoms that you might see that can alert us to this being an issue on your farm include:

- Fresh cows with milk fevers, retained cleansings, metritis, and LDAs.
- Cows a little further into lactation will have a chronic endometritis (cows with a vulval discharge,) poor follicular growth, cystic ovaries hence showing poor signs of heat/bulling and reduced conception rates from services. These signs are hormonal effects, secondary to negative energy balance.

What should we do to monitor nutritional status:

1. **Cow side blood testing to measure ketones in a small representative sample of freshly calved cows/heifers 3-21 days post calving.** The level of ketones present in the cow's blood are reflective of the degree of negative energy balance. Ketosis may be present in a sub-clinical or clinical form and testing enables us to identify issues earlier. We can do this on our routine visits.



2. **Regular Body Condition Scoring** at routine fertility visits as a monitoring tool. Cows are scored for 1-5 (1 being described as extremely thin). At no stage during the lactation cycle should a cow lose more than half a condition score. If she does then we should look at the transition phase.

Stage of lactation	Target BCS
At calving	2.5 - 3.0
60 days post-calving	2.0 - 2.5
100 days before drying off	2.5 - 3.0
At drying off	2.5 - 3.0

3. **Faecal consistency** is an important indicator of rumen health and whether food is retained for long enough to allow for proper microbial digestion. What we advise

doing is to collect fresh faecal samples and weigh them, rinse them under a tap through a sieve and what is left is weighed again. If this is more than 10% of the total weight and long fibres are present in this rinse then it would suggest that passage of food is too rapid.

4. **Rumen fill** is another parameter to be assessed; it gives us an indication as to the presentation of the ration and the digestibility of it. Full cows are content cows and hence we like to see a consistent rumen fill across the whole herd. Cows are scored from 1-5, 1 being extremely hollowed to 5 being outwardly distended. 3 is the optimum score for a milking cow, and 5 for a dry cow.

5. **Chewing and cudging;** when cows are lying down 70-75% of them should be cudging. Also, each cud should be chewed 50-70 times. Adequate cudging and chewing indicates that there is enough structural fibre in the diet.

6. **Assess silage dry matter;** we have noted with certain silage analysis that the dry matter is misleading which results in an imbalance of the ration as a whole. We can take a silage sample and measure an accurate dry matter of the silages both grass and maize.

This is a brief overview outlining how we can offer you assistance when assessing the effectiveness of your rations. **If we find that there is a problem with how your cows are performing and suspect a dietary influence then we would discuss this with your nutritionist.**

Chronic Liver Fluke

Late winter (January to April) is the period that we are most likely to see animals suffering with chronic liver fluke. This year, in the South West of England the risk of disease from liver fluke has been predicted to be moderate to high, so it is likely that many of our beef and sheep farmers will need to carry out strategic treatments in January.

Clinical signs in sheep: Loss of condition, weakness, emaciation, brittle fleece and anaemia. In severe cases bottle-jaw and terminal diarrhoea may be seen. Chronic disease can lead to a much higher barren rate at scanning – profits can easily be halved through reduced lamb crop and increased ewe mortality.



Clinical signs in cattle: Chronic weight loss and diarrhoea. Infection will massively reduce productivity. The appearance of clinical disease in a few animals represents serious losses in the whole herd.

Animals grazing potentially infected pastures may need to be treated and should be sampled to check for the presence of fluke eggs in faeces. Faecal samples from around 10 animals will identify patent fluke infection acquired during the autumn. Also, blood sampling several representative animals can also provide a sensitive indicator of herd/flock exposure.

Treatment; If treatment is required then there are a range of products available. We will not need to treat early immature fluke at this time of year and therefore do not need to use triclabendazole (Fasinex). Instead we can look at using nitroxylin (Trodax) and closantel (Flukiver) which are highly effective against late immature and adult fluke. Reducing the use of triclabendazoles will slow the development of resistance to this drug.

After treatment, improved nutrition is essential to restore body condition and production. If possible, sheep and cattle should be moved to fluke-free pastures after dosing.

If you have any questions regarding the control of liver fluke on your farm then please call and speak to one of our farm vets.

Our new Foot Crush has arrived!

As many of you are already aware we have purchased a new foot crush. The aim of this purchase is to provide a service where we can examine those cows that are showing distinct signs of lameness. It has been shown that any delays in treating lame cows will result in some irreversible changes within the cow's foot, usually in the third pedal bone, these changes reduce the likelihood of a return to normal mobility.



The ideal scenario would be to mobility score the herd, either done by us or yourselves and then we would have a list of cows that are scoring 2/3 i.e. those that are visibly lame and treat these as soon as possible. We do not want to advertise ourselves as a regular foot-trimming service since we do not want encroach onto the services provided by others as many of them do a very good job indeed.

If you would like to discuss having your herd mobility scored with a follow up "remedial cow trimming" service then please phone the surgery and ask to speak to Ian or Matthew.

Client Meeting - 22nd February



Our vet Matthew Burge will be attending the next “**Action Johnes Conference**” in Worcester on Tuesday 7th February. This conference is also open to farmers so if you are interested in coming along contact Matt for course details and a lift to the event! Matt will hold a client meeting at **7pm Wednesday 22nd February** at the Langton Arms, Tarrant Monkton, to pass on information from the conference. Please let us know if you would like to attend.

Ewe Nutrition - Preparing for Lambing

As lambing gets closer, it is important to ensure that ewes are in optimum condition. Most problems that are commonly seen in sheep around lambing time are related to poor nutrition. During the last 6 weeks of gestation the lambs have their greatest growth; the ewe's udder grows; colostrum is produced; brown fat is laid down in the lamb... this all places great demands on the ewe for energy and protein. Make sure that your ewes are fed a good quality, high energy and palatable diet at this crucial time.

How can we assess the nutritional needs of the ewes?

1. **Scanning:** This allows ewes to be fed and monitored according to whether they are barren, or carrying single/twin/triplet lambs.
2. **Metabolic profiles:** The best time to take blood samples from ewes is approximately 4 weeks before lambing, so that there is time to make adjustments to the feeding regime. Earlier than this, sheep are not yet in the high risk period and some energy problems could be missed. Bloods may be very cheaply analysed for albumin, urea and BHB amongst other metabolites. This is the only way to accurately assess how the ewes are coping with the diet. Contact us if you would like to arrange testing for your flock.
3. **Condition scoring:** The ideal body condition score (BCS) at lambing is 3.0-3.5. If ewes are in poorer condition then supplementary feeding needs to start earlier. If they are in good condition, then some energy deficits can be overcome by relying on the ewe's own reserves.

Reminder: Footvax and Cydectin 1% - Cydectin 1% injection for sheep **MUST NOT BE USED** in animals that have *any* previous history of vaccination against footrot, since it may lead to a severe reaction.

Bird Flu Update

On the 4th January 2017 APHA announced that the prevention zones applied across GB will remain in place until 28th February. Keepers of poultry and captive birds must continue to “house” them away from wild birds, maintain biosecurity measures and are reminded that gatherings of at-risk birds are still prohibited.



Clinical signs that poultry keepers should look for in their birds include: sudden death, swollen head, discolouration of neck and throat, loss of appetite, respiratory distress, diarrhoea and fewer eggs laid – although clinical signs vary between species of bird.

APHA encourage the public to report findings of dead wild birds to 03459 33 55 77. For further advice and guidance on what to do if you keep poultry, or to report suspicion of disease in your animals, call the Defra Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301.