



Howells Veterinary Services

York Road,
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Newsletter

PRACTICE NEWS

Welcome to the February issue of the Howells Veterinary Services Farm Newsletter.

This month we cover ketosis in dairy cows, and topical issues such as vitamin D deficiency in camelids, and abortion and orf in ewes.

There is another lambing course coming up on Wednesday 26th February. If you are interested in attending then please contact us at the practice for further details.

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PIP'S CORNER

This season we are promoting our "lambing buckets", containing everything you might need to manage birth and newborn lambs. "Standard" and "deluxe" buckets are available, and include items such as arm-length gloves, lubricant, iodine, feeders, ropes etc. Speak to me or one of the vets to find out more.

Ketosis in dairy cows

Ketosis is a complex metabolic syndrome often seen in high-producing dairy cattle in the first month post-calving. Many cows suffer sub-clinically; those showing clinical signs are usually the tip of the iceberg. Ketosis presents in a variety of ways from milk drop and a low temperature to nervous signs.

Risk factors include:

- Negative energy balance
- High body condition score (BCS) at the end of the dry period (>3)
- Milk fever
- Metritis / endometritis
- High-yielding cattle
- Any illness (pneumonia, digital dermatitis etc.)
- Retained cleansings.

Most of these risk factors are interrelated, with ketosis often being the outcome and sometimes the cause of such conditions. Many of these risk factors may be attributed to poorly managed nutrition during dry periods, with cows calving down over-conditioned.

Monitoring and managing:

BCS is the most cost-effective way of monitoring your herd's nutritional management. As a minimum, target cows in late lactation, at calving and 6-8 weeks after calving. Cows should calve at a BCS of 3 and lose no more than 0.75 of a score in the first 6-8 weeks of lactation. A BCS of over 3 or a loss of over 0.75 may indicate more problems, including ketosis. As well as body condition scoring, BHB (ketone) testing may also be useful in cows 5-40 days post-calving. This directly monitors ketosis, and can give us an idea of how many cows are currently affected without showing no clinical signs.

If adhered to, the above monitoring systems can help at-risk cows be picked up earlier and allow them to be monitored more closely. It is especially important to monitor these parameters when a change in diet occurs e.g. new clamp opened.

Vitamin D deficiency in camelids

In their natural environment in the Andes, alpacas and llamas obtain enough vitamin D from sunlight. In the UK they produce less vitamin D (especially during the winter as there is less sunlight), leading to an increased risk of deficiency.

Signs of deficiency include:

- Rickets in crias: stunted growth, angular limb deformities and lameness
- Lethargy
- Reduced appetite.

Vitamin D is also involved in immunity, as well as in foetal growth and mammary development, so supplementation may be useful in adult animals too.

There are oral pastes available for supplementation over the winter, as well as injectable vitamin D from your vet. If using the oral form, be sure to read the dosage instructions carefully and to weigh each animal. Overdosing of vitamin D can cause toxicity so it is very important that each animal receives the correct dose. Please speak to one of the vets for more information if you are concerned, or if you would like to discuss the dose required.



Visit our website for more information about the practice:

www.howellsvets.co.uk

Abortion in Ewes



Abortion at any point can be a frustrating and dejecting experience, but especially near full term; a great deal of time, effort and costs have got the ewe to this point in the production cycle. Isolated incidents of abortion are commonplace in most flocks, but an isolated incident can be the beginning of a greater problem.

Infectious causes of abortion account for the vast majority of losses after 100 days of gestation, although sporadic losses can occur due to rough handling or stressful activities. An abortion rate of more than 2% in a flock is suspicious of an infectious cause and should be investigated thoroughly.

The main infectious causes of abortion in the UK are enzootic abortion (caused by the bacterium *Chlamydophila abortus*), toxoplasmosis (a parasitic infection) and *Campylobacter*. These agents account for approximately 70% of abortions in UK sheep flocks, with an estimated cost for a single abortion case being £20-£65.

Enzootic abortion

- Infection by exposure to high levels of infectious aborted material.

- Infection causes immediate clinical signs when it occurs less than 6 weeks before the due date. If longer than 6 weeks pre-lambing, *Chlamydophila* can become latent and cause abortion in the **next** pregnancy.
- Live lambs born to infected ewes, and lambs fostered on to infected ewes may become infected and abort if bred during their first year.
- Once aborted the ewe develops immunity and will have a normal pregnancy in subsequent years.

Toxoplasmosis

- Infection can cause early loss of the embryo or fetus, abortion or mummification.
- Caused by a protozoal parasite which spends part of its life cycle in cats.
- May manifest as an increased barren rate due to early embryonic loss.
- Infection in mid-pregnancy will cause abortion, birth of weak lambs, or delivery of a mummified leathery fetus.

Abortion Protocol

The aim is to reduce the risk of other ewes coming into contact with potentially infectious material:

- Isolate aborting ewe.
- Remove abortion products- lambs and placenta.
- Dispose of bedding by incineration.

N.B. It is important to be aware that some causes of abortion in ewes can be transmitted to humans and can cause disease, especially in pregnant women. Be sure to practise good hygiene (including wearing gloves) when handling these ewes and any aborted material. Pregnant women should not work with lambing flocks and should be careful to avoid contamination.

Diagnosis of Abortion

- Submit all abortion products including placenta as soon as possible to local VLA centre for diagnosis.
- Investigate all causes of abortion.
- Barren ewe checks (sponsored by MSD Animal Health) can test for exposure to infectious causes of abortion. Please contact us at the surgery to discuss this.

Prevention

- Vaccination of breeding ewes 4-6 weeks before tupping will help to protect against enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis.
- Keep the lambing environment clean, and prevent vermin and cats gaining access to feed stores.
- Purchase replacements from accredited flocks.



Orf in sheep

Orf is caused by a pox virus that infects cuts and scratches in young lambs and causes a pustular dermatitis. There is no effective treatment but signs usually resolve after eight weeks. Antibiotics may be necessary if there is a secondary bacterial infection. The virus persists in dry scabs and can survive in the environment for many months and infect new batches of lambs every year. There is an effective and inexpensive vaccine available and it is advisable to vaccinate lambs. Call the practice if you would like to discuss vaccination or orf management with one of the vets.

