



Happy New Year!!

The New Year has started frosty and bright which is ideal for all things sheep. Hopefully this will continue. To coin a phrase recited by one of you sheep farmers recently, 'a green January makes a full church yard'! So, we'd like a nice cold one please.

Whilst New Year's resolutions are often broken and add to usual pressures, a focused mind at the start of the year is essential for a successful lambing. Every lambing brings different challenges and therefore our plan and actions need to be different each year. Doing the same thing year after year will not be successful and accumulates unnecessary costs.

Do you have recurring problems each year at lambing time?

Watery mouth, high lamb losses in the shed or after turnout? If so, then there is scope for assessing your system and reducing your losses by a 'tweaking' or a changing your practice.

Where do I start?

Start with the ewe. We know that the **EWE** is everything! Her profitability and the health of her lambs will be reduced if she is not healthy and in optimum body condition at lambing.

- **What are you going to feed at lambing time?** Did you get your forage analysed? If so then you can select the most appropriate concentrate feed. Remember it is not the amount of protein that is important but the 'type' of protein.

Spend your money on high levels (12-15%) of a **digestible undegradable protein (DUP)** i.e. protein that drives the quality and amount of colostrum by being digested in the small intestine in the ewe and not by the rumen microbes.

Hipro soya is the superior DUP with rapeseed meal in second place. Plan now to obtain the details and inclusion rates on the different components. These are not always displayed on the bag, you must request them from the manufacturer and they will either email or give you a print out.

Feed is one of your highest costs at lambing time, so make sure you get what you have paid for.

- **Body condition score** – aim for 3-3.5 for lowland ewes and 2.5 for hill breed ewes. This CANNOT be changed in the 6-8 weeks before lambing.

This is the time during which 75% of foetal growth occurs, therefore most of the extra energy and protein will be diverted to the lambs. However – separating off the leaner ewes and feeding together with the triplets will significantly reduce the risk of twin lambs disease and supply much needed energy closer to lambing. This will help with milk production and the demands of lambing and late pregnancy. Feeding in lambing groups is very beneficial for most systems.

- **Lame ewes** – The December newsletter helpfully described how to diagnose, treat and control lameness. This next 4 weeks is crucial. Sort out any lame ewes now. If housing the sheep, separate off any lame ones and leave out until treated and sound – do not house them until healed.

Even if you have vaccinated using Footvax, housing lame ewes will increase the challenge of infection in the shed and make spreading infection far more likely.

We know that lame ewes produce poorer quality colostrum, less milk and have delayed 8 week weights in their lambs compared to sound ewes.

If they are lame they will eat/graze less, be at higher risk of getting mastitis and have lower body condition scores. The knock on effect is that their lambs are more likely to get watery mouth, joint ill and coccidiosis and other neonatal diseases.

It is therefore cheaper to sort out the problem before lambing. Speak to us at the practice if you



are unsure of the diagnosis or would like help devising a lameness plan.

- **Abortion protection** – Lamb losses that occur before the start of lambing or during lambing are commonly due to abortion infections. Many of you are vaccinating for the two most common causes of abortion, which are enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis. Using enzovax and toxovax are very good insurance policies against these diseases and so your flock will already be well protected.

Don't forget the MSD Barren Ewe check runs until March for those of you with 2% or more barren and not already vaccinating.

More Abortion?...Schmallenberg

Alongside the traditional abortion losses, we may potentially see losses again from Schmallenberg virus (SBV), a disease which is more difficult to protect against. Following the initial outbreak in 2011-2012, the numbers of cases of SBV in cattle and sheep had reduced and in 2014 there was a large decline in the number of cases reported.

A study carried out by The University of Liverpool (A freedom from disease study: Schmallenberg virus in the south of England in 2015) concluded that it is likely that the antibody status of the national flock has significantly reduced due to low levels of circulating virus, meaning that sheep are more likely to be naive and at risk from infection in the future.

SBV is transmitted by biting midges (Culicoides) and the risk period is between 28-60 days of gestation. Therefore, we are coming to the end of this period already and so there is little we can do for this lambing period. The current advice is for vets and farmers to be vigilant and report cases of deformed lambs and high levels of still births and abortion. This is particularly important where your flock is already protected against toxoplasma and enzootic abortion. We will keep you updated as more information becomes available.

Lambing Skills Course 2017

Preventing Lambing Losses - The key to a more profitable lambing?

At Wood Vet Group – Quedgeley on Tuesday 17th January 2017

2.30pm – 5pm with Tea, Coffee and Cakes provided!

£20 per person plus vat - Free to Flock Health scheme members

- **Why do we lose newborn lambs?**
- **Spotting trends in the shed – are our ewes performing?**
- **On farm Post mortems – a basic demonstration to help you on farm**
- **Lamb and ewe diseases – are we using the right treatments?**

This course will be suited to all levels but particularly experienced shepherds and sheep keepers who want to improve the lambing % and reduce lamb mortality. Looking at how many lambs you expected based on scanning, versus how many you've sold at the end of the year can be very eye opening. The aim of this course will be to help you understand why you lose lambs and help reduce those losses. Please phone to book 01452 543999 or email largeanimal@woodvet.co.uk

Basic Lambing Course for small flock keepers, students and novice shepherds on 15th February 2017