



Gamebird Newsletter 2017

Avian Influenza

A more challenging time for the poultry and game bird sector within the UK is difficult to recall, but as the saying goes “what doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger.”

As we look forward to the next season, there are many plans and contingencies we need to put in place:

a) Keeping up to date

As the Avian Influenza disease situation continues to develop both in the UK and Europe with the changing requirements for housing/netting birds, depending on whether you are in a High Risk Area (HRA) or otherwise, we may see more disease outbreaks in the next few weeks as free range poultry flocks are allowed out to range.

The establishment and continued reassessment of the HRAs is obviously designed to minimise this risk. The www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu website has regular updates of the disease situation and advice.

b) Biosecurity

Never has this been more important. Following on from one of our meetings a couple of years ago, many of you improved biosecurity measures on farm. This year, there are several challenges facing the industry in which good biosecurity plays a crucial role.

Whilst we all hope that measures will be relaxed after the 30th of April, the continued presence of this H5N8 strain of Avian Influenza within the country is difficult to predict.

This relaxation of restrictions will coincide with the start of movements of large numbers of chicks or eggs around the country and importation from suppliers in France. It will be essential that you have good biosecurity policies in place including hygiene of personnel, clothing, dips, equipment and vehicles, as well as good vermin control, site management and positioning. Minimising the access of wild birds to waste feed and reducing all potential wild bird interaction to a minimum is vital and avoiding non essential visitors onto units.

Further guidance regarding biosecurity is available on the gov.uk website as well as specific gamebird websites and publications such as the Revised Advice on Bird Flu and Gamebirds published on 3rd of March 2017 available on the various industry websites.

c) Disease Monitoring

Avian Influenza is a notifiable disease and if you have any concerns regarding the health of your birds please contact one of us. Any unexplained mortality, coughing, sneezing, depressed demeanour and reduced food and water consumption must be investigated. Early investigation is key.

d) Record Keeping

Good records always underpin disease control. Record keeping should be seen as an opportunity to reflect on performance during the rearing season and analyse and make changes for future years.

Antibiotic use in Gamebirds

We have, along with other Gamebird practices, submitted totals amounts of antibiotics prescribed in 2015 and 2016 as part of the Government lead drive to reduce antibiotic usage across all areas of livestock production, to address the growing threat and concern of antimicrobial resistance. The figures submitted will allow an evaluation of antibiotic usage within the industry on a mg/kg ie: amount of antibiotic (mg) per kg of gamebird. Whilst in our sector this is going to be estimation, it will provide a benchmark point from which there will be downward pressure to reduce usage in line with other livestock sectors year on year.

So the heightened biosecurity requirements for A.I. should be seen as an opportunity to drive improved rearing standards and environments which will reduce antibiotic use going forward. We will need to work together to remove antibiotics as a crutch for bad practice and use them as a targeted therapy in specific disease outbreaks.

Mycoplasma

Several units experienced significant problems with “Bulgy eye” in young poults last year. This appears to be a growing problem nationwide and further research is ongoing. It is a very difficult and frustrating condition to treat and again good biosecurity practices are essential and can work well to limit spread across the rearing field.

We wish you all the best of luck in what is going to be a very challenging season. If you have any concerns and points you wish to discuss please contact us at the surgery.

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