



THE  
WOOD  
VETERINARY  
GROUP



FARM NEWSLETTER  
MAY 2017

Silaging has well and truly kicked off with wagons filling the lanes and all of you checking the forecast more than normal – which is saying something! With many of you really targeting milk litres and youngstock liveweight gains from forage we hope it is all going to plan and look forward to seeing full clamps.

### Germany Farm Study Tour – Paul Cunliffe MRCVS

Normally, the best outcome of a study tour is learning some brand new techniques and processes and to bring them back to make all our working lives better and a little more productive. However, on a recent tour of dairy farms in North East Germany I was struck by the huge similarities of the strengths and weaknesses between the U.K. and this region. It is quite satisfying to confirm that for the most part, we are doing a pretty good job; although we can't rest on our laurels.

Arguably, Germany has had an even tougher time in recent years with regard to low milk price. Many more farms have left the industry altogether whilst others, in particular the smaller farms, have diversified extensively. Many of the smaller dairy farms are found close to Hamburg. Here there has been a real focus on direct milk retailing, including vending machines and value added products with its proximity to a large population. Robots, Open Farms, on site shops and farm cafes are all being tried out by farms.



Most of the farms we visited had invested in Anaerobic Digestion plants which had been heavily subsidised in the country. As a consequence, none of the farms used sand as a bedding material, despite sand's obvious strengths, due to the difficulty of managing it with a digester.

Recycled Manure Solids (RMS), both pre and post digester were extensively used to bed cubicles with no deleterious effects on mastitis or SCC. The legislation on RMS seemed much more lax than in the UK with RMS invariably mixed with lime products before use. Most new buildings (and old) had been designed and built with slats. Interestingly, the major lameness issue here was still Digital Dermatitis and it appeared that despite this, daily use of formalin footbaths was not common place.

Many of the large farms visited (1,000 – 2,000 cows) were situated in former East Germany. Thirty years ago when unified, the government provided many incentives for West German farmers to relocate here. Despite the recent milk price issues many are still expanding. One particularly entrepreneurial farmer however, was not expanding his dairy enterprise but thought there was more money in golf, hence a pitch and putt on site!

The larger farms are run on a typical 'American system' as seen in the photographs, with a foreign workforce (often Bulgarian), a high maize TMR and Standard Operating Procedures for all farm processes.



Interestingly, three infectious diseases we are very aware of here in the U.K. are dealt with very differently in this region of Germany.

- BVD – Control is seen as crucial and therefore to achieve this they have made Tag and Test compulsory for all calves. Is compulsion the only true way to eradicate a disease?
- IBR – Part of the area is officially IBR free and therefore no longer allowed to vaccinate. Many of the farmers were sceptical of both options.
- Johne's – No official control program is in place and therefore positive cows are not identified through testing. An official eradication programme was used in another area of Germany but collapsed after a drop in investment.

One thing is certain, the farmers we visited were uniformly negative about the progression of Brexit, as they perceived a future negative effect on their exports and the single market viability. I must thank Abbey Farmers for the opportunity and invitation to visit Germany with them on this very interesting trip.



### Cutting the fat? Don't scrimp on Minerals

In the past 12 months we have seen some interesting cases of perinatal mortality in calves. Several farms reported a run of calves either born dead or that died very shortly after birth. Calves born to mothers with an Iodine deficiency can be born dead or weak and unable to suck. Iodine is required for making thyroid hormone and so calves have a characteristic enlarged thyroid gland at the top of the neck.

There are two causes of Iodine deficiency:

**Primary** – A lack of Iodine intake in the diet – some geographical areas have naturally lower levels

**Secondary** – Ingestion of thiocyanate which interferes with the production of the thyroid hormone – this comes from grazing Brassicas and Legumes.



When cows are grazing Brassicas they need a much higher level of supplementation at 0.5mg/kg as supposed to the 0.2-0.3mg/kg when grazing pasture. Minerals being added to ruminant diets ought to be double checked for the level of Iodine it provides. Speak to us at the practice if you think this may be an issue in your herd or flock to discuss how best to approach supplementation.

### STOP PRESS

We are delighted to announce that Richard has passed his final advanced exams and so now is the proud holder of the Category One Dutch Diploma recognised as the highest level a professional trimmer can attain and by the National Association Cattle Foot Trimmers. Congratulations Rich!

### Meetings

**Beef Discussion Group**  
**Launch of THE KILO CLUB & Farm Walk**

**WHAT MAKES YOU PRODUCTIVE?**

**WEDNESDAY 17<sup>th</sup> MAY**

**11.30am – 4pm**

**Tweenhills Stud at Slopers Farm, Hartpury,  
 GL19 3BP**

**A hot lunch will be provided**

**Book your place on: 01452 543 999**

