



Spring should be appearing soon; although weather reports suggest a few icy weeks ahead. We recently held our 2nd lambing meeting of the year for our novice and smallholder clients – this year focusing on simple on farm investigation for lamb deaths.

Lamb Death Investigation

Deaths on farm are incredibly frustrating; therefore, good record keeping is essential to monitor diseases, highlight patterns and identify areas for improved management.

A simple, quick external examination on farm can provide a vast amount of information while a post mortem for examination of internal organs can provide extra levels of detail regarding possible timing and cause of death.

Useful features to record:

- Varying stages of decomposition (e.g. mummified) and the size of the foetus should be interpreted carefully but may indicate an infectious cause of abortion

- Evidence of swollen heads and tongues can indicate dystocia and may mean faster intervention is needed during lambing
- Presence of gel like pads on lambs' feet indicate if the lamb stood up or not
- Inspection of lung tissue will determine if the lamb ever took a breath or attempted to breathe
- Examination of stomach contents for milk clots and kidneys for 'brown fat' reserves can indicate exposure or hypothermia as a cause of death

If you are interested in learning how to complete post mortems on farm for dead lamb investigations, please speak to one of us.

Common Conditions

In the last few weeks we have received quite a few queries regarding common conditions affecting new born lambs – in particular joint ill and entropion. Here are some key points as reminders:

Entropion

Entropion is the 'in-turning' of the eyelids and typically affects the lower eyelid. The condition can affect one or both eyes and is commonly seen in new born and very young lambs. The 'curling' of the eyelid causes the eyelashes of the lower eyelid margin to rub uncomfortably against the delicate outer surface of the eye, the 'cornea'. This is painful for the lamb and typically causes noticeable tearing of the eye; if left unchecked lambs can develop corneal ulceration and blindness.

Clinical signs:

- Wet cheeks / tear tracts
- Lambs holding eyes closed / partially open
- Yellow / sticky discharge from eyes
- Pink / inflamed eyelid margins
- Pale blue / cloudy area visible on the eye



Treatment:

For mild cases, pinching of the lower eyelid to encourage the eyelid to flip out correctly alongside treatment with an ocular antibiotic cream (Opticlox eye ointment) will allow for lubrication and prevent secondary bacterial infections. In more severe cases, please seek vet advice as treatment by injection of the lower eyelid with a long acting antibiotic or use of square metal clips may be needed.

*This condition has a strong genetic link. Are you noticing a spike in cases and have used a new ram this season? – He may well be a carrier of the 'entropion gene'. To avoid breeding the condition into the flock, **do not** keep lambs that suffered with entropion as breeding replacements.*

Joint Ill

Joint ill is an issue which appears year on year. Infection is established through ingestion of bacteria or via the lamb's navel; bacteria then spread in the blood stream to settle in the joints. Lambs may appear sick, reluctant to suck, or remain lying down for long periods of time – often in the very early stages of the condition large distended joints may not be present. It is therefore important to feel and compare joints in any suspicious cases – characteristic hot and swollen joints can be all too easily missed meaning treatment delays.

Environmental pressure in pens and sheds is the driving factor for cases; hygiene is therefore key e.g. clean out pens, spread lime and freshly bed up between ewes. Lamb navels should be treated at

birth with **10% strong iodine** to encourage the umbilicus to crisp and dry preventing bacterial entry to the abdomen.

Treatment:

- A daily injectable antibiotic – e.g. pen & strep with an anti-inflammatory drug i.e. Metacam/Finadyne is needed.
- Antibiotic treatment must be for a minimum of 7 days; treat past the point of visible improvement to avoid relapses.

Please be aware only early treatment will result in good responses – joint damage can be fast and permanent if not caught early.

Golden Tips

This month there is an initiative through RUMA promoting the 'liquid gold' that is colostrum.

The campaign emphasises the following points regarding colostrum management for sheep:

- In the 1st 24 hours lambs require 210–290 ml/kg body weight of colostrum; equating to a 5kg lamb needing over 1 litre of colostrum to equip it with essential levels of antibodies. The first feed must be within 2 hours of birth – **we suggest 50ml/kg as a volume for this first feed!**
- The campaign has also highlighted some worrying facts. From the VMDs' completed antibiotic resistance report (2016) 50% of E.coli that commonly infect neonatal lambs were found to be resistant to spectinomycin – our only oral treatment for watery mouth (Spectam). With over half of UK lamb estimated to receive oral antibiotics prophylactically at birth, this level of resistance will only get worse. Adequate colostrum fed at birth will virtually eliminate diseases such as Watery Mouth in lambs and stop us having to use Spectam routinely.

Are you sure your lambs receive adequate colostrum for their weight?

Make it a target for the following month to weigh lambs and feed colostrum appropriately

#ColostrumIsGold

Ewe Considerations

We have been finding evidence of chronic mastitis on farm recently. Be vigilant in checking your flock – these ewes are unlikely to be producing good volumes of colostrum or milk and may need a twin taking off them.

When checking, ensure you feel the whole udder, you won't identify issues feeling teats alone. Chronic mastitis cases are likely to have hardened lumps or thickened tissue and may appear lumpy or asymmetrical. If found at weaning, these ewes should be marked as cull animals, there should be no reason for them to remain in the breeding flock. Frustratingly some only present when developing milk for the next lactation!

With cold weather forecasted, for those of you turning out already, assess grass availability and ensure ewes are receiving adequate supplementary feed to maintain milk supply and avoid any acute mastitis issues – lambs will require more milk to compensate for the cold weather!

Regularly checking ewes for signs of acute mastitis – firm, swollen and hot udders - will be beneficial not only for prompt treatment but also in preventing lamb hypothermia issues!

Acute mastitis Treatment:

- Ewes will need a daily injectable antibiotic for 3 days minimum (e.g. Amoxypen or Pen&Strep) and anti-inflammatory treatment will be essential e.g. Finadyne daily for 3 days
- For ewes not eating, drenching with Cetophyton and 2 litres of warm water
- Strip out the affected teat frequently

For ewes showing poor signs of improvement, discuss additional treatment options with a vet

