THE WOOD VETERINARY GROUP

SHEEP NEWSLETTER March 2020

Lamb care and colostrum

#ColostrumIsGold

Limiting lamb mortality is crucial for productivity in flocks and for morale. For a typical indoor lambing lowland flock, losses should be well under 6% of lambs between birth and turnout.
Colostrum is 'liquid gold' and this first feed is crucial for lamb survival. Any fit ewes with singles can be used for colostrum collection on farm; surplus colostrum can be stored for up to 1 week in the fridge and 1 year in the freezer providing a ready supply on hand for assisted feeding.

We recommend:

- Lambs need 210ml/kg of colostrum within the 1st 24hrs of life
- 1st colostrum feed within 2 hrs of birth
- Administer 50ml/kg of colostrum – tube feed 250ml total as 1st feed if required

Within 24hrs a typical 5kg lamb will need more than 1 litre of colostrum to achieve antibody transfer. This first feed is also crucial for providing energy to maintain body temperature. Should lambs fail to suckle or remain wet, hypothermia can set it.

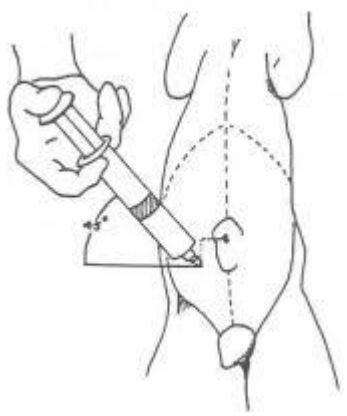
Reviving hypothermic lambs

A lamb's normal temperature is 39 to 40°C. Lambs can survive quite low temperatures however, if they are left wet or in a draught they can quite quickly become hypothermic (low temperature). This is a very common cause of death in lambs, particularly if the mother is not quite up to scratch. Starvation or poor milk volume also causes hypothermia when glucose levels drop dangerously low and the lamb is unable to produce its own heat. Lambs can be either found dead or in a coma. Triplets below 4.5kg are particularly high risk for hypothermia due to lower brown fat reserves and larger surface area to weight ratio speeding up heat loss. They also have a reduced survival rate from hypothermia so if in doubt feed triplets early on.

Clinical hypothermia is LESS THAN 39 °C – if you find lambs standing hunched or recumbent, use a thermometer to check: 37-39°C = Mild – Moderate hypothermia. Less than 37°C = Severe hypothermia.
In the worst case the lamb will be comatose but don't give up, with some effort it is possible to save lambs even at this stage.

- **< 6 hours old** - Still have brown fat reserve. If weak but has a suck reflex – stomach tube with warm colostrum 50ml (ideally from mother), dry thoroughly & place in warming box and monitor
- **> 6 hours old** - Brown fat reserves have depleted – lamb needs energy source urgently. FIRST Inject intraperitoneal glucose. SECOND place in warming box. Once swallow reflex returns – tube 50ml colostrum.

If you are unsure of the lamb's age, ALWAYS assume they are older than 6 hours to avoid risk of a diabetic coma



IP injection

The current available glucose solution is a 50% concentration, this should be diluted to 20% with boiled water and administered warm. E.g. 4kg lamb getting 10ml/kg would require 40ml – 16ml of glucose solution and 24ml of sterile water/cooled boiled water. Hold the lamb suspended by its forelimbs, with its back against your body. Use a 19 gauge 1 inch needle, insert the needle approximately one inch to the side and one inch lower than the umbilicus, pointing the needle in the direction of the lambs pelvis. Slowly inject glucose solution. Ask a vet to show you this technique.

Wet weather!

As mentioned in the main farm newsletter large parts of the county have been struggling with flooding or if not then just wet pasture! These challenging conditions will mean that there is limited suitable pasture for post lambing turnout, putting extra pressure on the housing environment. Therefore, we need to be extra vigilant on hygiene and be aware of the increased risk of illnesses that are linked to damp conditions such as navel ill, joint ill and watery mouth to name a few. Once you are able to turnout, nutrition needs to be evaluated carefully as poor grass quality or contamination may lead to poor milk supplies in the ewe. Consider maintain nutrition during peak lactation through creep feeding for longer or at higher levels this year in particular.

Housing considerations:

- Use plenty of straw in lambing sheds/pens to prevent lambs sitting on damp bedding and provide them with a warm environment – this pushes energy in to growth not heat production
- Clean out as frequently as possible, removing all organic matter e.g. straw, faeces etc.
- Use disinfectant/lime prior to bedding pens up
- Keep drainage channels clear from blockages of straw to prevent further accumulations of standing water
- Make sure you have plenty of iodine available for dipping navels
- Make sure you are up to date with prevention and treatment protocols for the main lamb and ewe illnesses – speak to your vet if you are unsure or would like an up to date protocol

A New Face

We are really pleased to welcome a new vet Katie Kipling to the farm team. Katie is an experienced vet who is returning home to Gloucestershire from practice in Scotland. She will be out on farm from the beginning of March so give her a warm welcome to the Wood's team.