Lambing is upon some of us, or soon will be for everyone else! In this month's newsletter we will be discussing colostrum management and how best to prevent watery mouth.

Lambs are born completely naïve to infection, unlike humans, no antibodies cross the placenta therefore their only source of antibodies is via the colostrum. If little or no antibodies are absorbed, then this is termed failure of passive transfer and lambs are at serious risk of disease, in particular watery mouth and joint ill.

3Q's of Colostrum

#ColostrumIsGold

- **QUALITY** – quality varies greatly from ewe to ewe. A brix refractometer is a device used to measure the quality of colostrum. >22% is the absolute minimal cut off for good quality colostrum, but the higher the better! >26.5% is considered to be very good quality
- **QUANTITY** - **50ml/kg** as soon after birth as possible (**within 4-6 hours**)
  - ➢ In **the first 24 hours of life**, the lamb must receive **200ml/kg of colostrum** (i.e. a 5kg single must have 1 litre in the first 24 hours)
  - ➢ Remember – artificial colostrum is a supplement to ewe's colostrum and NOT an alternative. It should be used as a last resort, and those lambs which receive only this should be very closely monitored for signs of illness.
- **QUICKLY** – research shows that 6 hours after birth, the ability of antibodies to cross the gut is reduced, therefore it is vital that the lamb receives adequate colostrum before this stage. Further to this, the level of antibodies in colostrum declines rapidly after the ewe has given birth. After 24 hours the concentration of the main antibody, IgG drops by 95%. Store Colostrum in clean containers
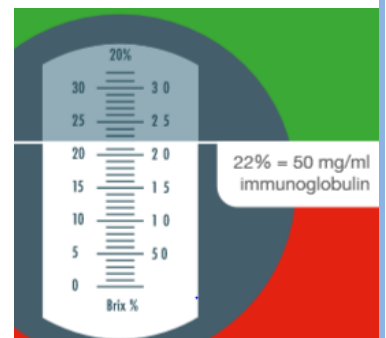
We have spoken to many clients recently concerned that their lambs are receiving sufficient colostrum but still getting watery mouth. The quality of the colostrum is absolutely paramount, and if they do not receive enough **GOOD QUALITY** then they may still succumb to watery mouth.

Brix refractometer

A Brix refractometer is a device that can be used to measure the quality of colostrum. They are very easy to use. Firstly, using a pipette place a drop of colostrum onto the prism and lower the cover case. Then hold it up to the light and look through the eye piece. The brix value is the line that is the divide between the light and dark sections. After using the refractometer, the prism and cover should be cleaned to ensure no residues impact the measurement of the next sample that is tested.

Recent research has shown that inadequate nutrition of the ewe can result in delayed onset of lactation and surprisingly, increases the thickness of colostrum making it harder for the lamb to suck it from the teat. We understand it would be difficult to measure the colostrum of all ewes, so if you're using it for the first time, try measuring the quality of thinner ewes, lame ewes and triplet bearing ewes.

Please contact us at the practice to purchase a refractometer.

Harvesting colostrum

Harvesting colostrum from ewes with plenty to spare is an ideal way to ensure you have colostrum when you need it. Single bearing ewes are ideal candidates, but make sure the single lamb gets their fair share first! Containers must be immaculately clean, with lids. Label pots with the date of collection and store it in small amounts, this will make it easier to defrost.

If a ewe does not have sufficient colostrum:
- The next best thing would be to get colostrum from **another ewe in the flock**
- **The second best option, would be pooled cow's colostrum**, however you need 10% more as cows colostrum is less antibody dense. Ideally, if you have your own cows, their colostrum would be better than cows colostrum from another farm because it would contain specific antibodies to the bugs present on your farm. If obtaining cow colostrum from another farm, ensure it is pooled and that it has come from cows with a known current negative Johne's status. **Artificial colostrum** should be a last resort.

If you've managed to freeze colostrum, that's brilliant! But now great care must be taken when defrosting it to ensure you don't lose those priceless antibodies! We would advise that it is defrosted in a warm bath no hotter than 55°C. Do not defrost in a microwave or with boiling water, as these two methods will destroy all the valuable antibodies in the colostrum.

Prevention of watery mouth

Prevention of watery mouth must now focus fully on management strategies, as spectam is no longer being produced.

The following measures should be used to reduce the risk of lambs getting watery mouth:
- Colostrum intakes are key – **lambs that receive enough quality colostrum will not get watery mouth**. Care not to dilute down ewe colostrum too much with artificial colostrum, this can reduce the amount of antibodies that are absorbed. Try and identify lambs at risk of watery mouth (i.e. triplets), and supplement them all as soon as possible.
- If supplementing lambs, keep bottles and stomach tubes squeaky clean!
- Hygiene – in both bonding pens and main housing pens
  - Clean out bonding pens and disinfect with powered lime disinfectant
  - Main pens should be bedded down as frequently as necessary but keep ewes clean
- Crutching the ewe to remove any daggings
- Always wear gloves when assisting ewes that are lambing
- Use strong iodine (10%) to dip/spray navels as soon as possible, then repeat 4-6 hours later. We are aware of the shortage of strong iodine, please speak to us at the practice about alternatives
- If you do find yourself having an outbreak of watery mouth, please get in contact with us at the practice so that we can advise you further as with prompt correct treatment lamb survival is good

HEPATAVAC P – Vaccinate ewes 4-6 weeks pre-lambing to ensure antibodies are present in colostrum. After shortages of vaccines we are now able to get in Heptavac P so please ring the office to place orders for March and April lambers

OVIVAC P – should be used to vaccinate youngstock not destined for breeding and can be given from 3 weeks of age. 2 injections 4-6 weeks apart. Often can be paired with Nematodirus treatments

Wood Vets Farm Team   @woodvetsfarmteam