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ALPACA BLOOD DRIVE

Keep an eye on our website and social media over the next month. We will be releasing the confirmed date for the next alpaca blood drive!



Bovine TB – Taking control and protecting your herd

Bovine TB is a complicated, political disease in the UK but it is also an infectious disease and as such there are things that can be done to reduce the risk of an outbreak in the herd.

TB is a bacterial condition and cattle can be infected by the oral or respiratory route. Bacteria breathed in are most likely to result in disease and, once infected, clinical lesions can remain in one body system or spread throughout the whole animal. Clinical signs may not be seen for months or years. (we saw a 4% increase in new herd incidents from 2016 to 2017)



The skin test that we use at routine herd tests has a bad reputation but, the fact is, that it misses more infected animals than it will incorrectly identify reactors - 19% of infected cattle will be missed but only 0.02% (1/5000) of reactors are genuinely not infected. Additionally, while only 40% of reactors are found to have clinical lesions at post mortem, this doesn't mean they weren't infected and the test was wrong, just that TB is very hard to identify at PM!

As far as disease control goes, it is not luck or magic that stops TB entering a herd; it is down to good biosecurity and forward planning. These aren't going to eliminate the risk but reducing the risk of TB to your herds is definitely worth a bit of effort.

RESTRICT contact between cattle and badgers. APHA state 16% of TB in the UK is related to badger contact and as nose to nose contact between cattle and badgers is rare, the most likely route is via contamination of the shared environment. A TB infected badger is likely to have widespread disease and as such will be shedding TB bacteria via urine, faeces, sputum, saliva and/or pus from open wounds. Signs of badger activity - latrine sites, runs and setts can be fenced off if possible, and, as badgers are opportunistic feeders, any feed spills etc. should be cleaned up ASAP.

MANAGE feed and water. If feed and water are accessible to badgers they will take advantage. Floor feeding at pasture, lower level water troughs and unsecure feed storage all present the risk of disease transmission. Badgers may be accessing the yards at night when you are unaware, and are very good at getting through the smallest of gaps and climbing if foot holds are available. www.tbhub.co.uk has some great images of badgers getting where they shouldn't but also good, practical tips to keep them out and away from your stock.

STOP infected cattle entering the herd. If buying stock, the minimum you need to know is the date of the pre-movement test, the date of the last whole herd test and when the farm achieved Officially TB Free (OTF) status - ie when the farm last had a breakdown. In the edge area 83% of farms have been OTF for over 10 years, in the high risk area 54% have been free for 10 years and 43% for 5 years – so, even if buying from high risk areas, TB free farms are out there. It is very worth remembering 50% of TB breakdowns in the edge area are traced back to bought in cattle. Once purchased isolating new stock and voluntarily post-movement testing after 60 days will further help reduce the risk. Compulsory post-movement testing has been in place in the low risk area since 2016.

REDUCE risk from neighbouring herds. You can check local TB breakdowns on www.ibTB.co.uk, and maintaining herd boundaries are essential for many reasons, TB included.

MINIMISE infection from manure. TB bacteria can survive in manure for up to 6 months - don't spread any slurry from other farms, avoid spread onto grazing, or at least don't graze for 2 months after spreading, and reduce access for wildlife to slurry stores.



Pelvic Scoring in Heifers

Calving problems or dystocia can be a problem in some herds, with heifers usually requiring the majority of assistance. The main cause of dystocia in cows is a very large calf size or weight that is disproportionate to the pelvic canal area in the animal. Certain genetic lines have been identified in bulls that pass on a genetic link for smaller calf size and weights for increased calving ease.

A relatively new way to measure a replacement heifer's predicted calving ease is to measure her pelvic area at approximately 13 months old. Evidence suggests that measuring the horizontal and vertical measurements at 13 months (or as close to as possible) allows us to predict her calving ease at 2 years old, when she is hopefully expecting her first calf. Data suggests heifers need a pelvic area of 140cm² at 13 months old. This can be done by using our pelvic measuring callipers on farm and then using a computer-generated equation to calculate pelvic size back in the office.

If it is available, taking the weight of the heifer at the same time can also allow us to utilise an extra piece of data and predict the maximum size calf that the heifer can deliver without encountering dystocia. There have been some occasions so far with heifers measuring under the required area but still able to cope with at least a 50kg calf. Combining this information with your farm data, bull availability, etc, could change your overall decision for the heifer or group, especially if pelvic area and calf size are found to be very small.

However, if you think you are interested in pelvic measuring prior to serving heifers, please talk to us in the office.



Watery Mouth in Lambs

Watery mouth can be a real problem on some farms during lambing. Antibiotics, such as Spectam Scour Halt, are available to help reduce the number of losses due to watery mouth and scour. Spectam contains an antibiotic targeting E. coli, which causes watery mouth and scour in neonatal lambs. When it is given to lambs as close to birth as possible, it can prevent E. coli causing diseases and thus reducing lamb losses.

However, relying on Spectam as a prophylactic treatment, i.e. before clinical signs appear in all cases, is often not required and on the majority of farms, can be reduced or stopped all together. E. coli can only cause disease if there are no antibodies for protection. These antibodies are abundant in colostrum and if a lamb receives enough at birth before a challenge of E. coli is experienced, the lamb can fight the infection.

There are a proportion of lambs born in each flock that may not get the appropriate quality or quantity of colostrum required to protect them sufficiently against E. coli. Lambs born to thinner ewes or those with inadequate feed available, triplets or low birth weight lambs, lambs born in poor environmental/hygienic conditions and those born in the later weeks of the season are at an increased risk of contracting watery mouth. In comparison if lambs receive adequate colostrum, are fit single lambs, born in the first few weeks of lambing and into good environmental conditions, they are at a low risk of getting disease.

Lambing pen hygiene is crucial in reducing the exposure to E. coli so maintaining a strict protocol with effective products will minimise disease. In lambs with dubious colostrum transfer and during times where hygiene has been less adequate there is a potential risk of watery mouth or scour so these lambs should receive Spectam.

Providing lambs are born into a clean environment with excellent colostrum administration as soon after birth as possible, there is minimal requirement for Spectam to be administered.

Reducing the use of antibiotics at lambing is part of the industry wide scheme to help reduce the antibiotic level currently used to produce animals. The general scheme aims to reduce, refine and replace antibiotic use in animals with appropriate alternatives. This could be via increased ewe health, hygiene, husbandry, vaccine uptake or by using antibiotics in a way that minimises the risk of developing antibiotic resistance. Further antibiotic resistance information and why we are so concerned with it can be found on our website blog section, in previous newsletters or through EIs in the office.



TVC

We wish all our clients a very healthy and problem-free 2018 lambing period but just in case you do need us, we'd like to remind everyone of our highly successful Lambing Club.

Subscription to the Lambing Club allows you take advantage of discounts of up to 60% on lambings and ewe caesareans. The subscription fee this year is £153.11.

Lambings are then charged at £19.42 and caesareans £46.82. Both of these prices include antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and any local anaesthetic required for epidurals or in order to perform a caesarean. Ewes can be brought to the surgery, saving on additional visit costs, or we can attend the farm for your standard visit fee.

Being a member of the lambing club offers the chance to seek early veterinary intervention in the case of difficult lambings. Early intervention results in a better outcome for both ewe and lambs which is the reason that people sign up year after year!

