

Skinny Sheep Checks

With summer fast approaching, it's time to look ahead to getting the ewes in tip top condition to head back to the tup. Ewes identified as being skinny at weaning (below the target body condition score of 2.5) should be separated from the main group as these ewes will need time and a good diet to reach target body condition score for tupping. This can be a helpful time to get the records out and see if these girls have any excuse to be skinny (teeth, feet, triplets etc.). If their body condition doesn't improve with good feed and time then it is worth thinking of a targeted disease screen to check both individual animal and flock status.

The UK national flock has a huge, undiagnosed 'Iceberg Disease' issue. An 'Iceberg Disease' is a disease where, as vets and farmers, we only see a minority of the cases of any given disease (the tip of the iceberg). For every case we see, there is likely to be many more animals with pre-clinical disease in the flock (majority of the iceberg submerged beneath the water).

The main iceberg diseases in the UK flock are:

- Maedi Visna (MV)
- Caseous Lymphadenitis (CLA)
- Ovine Johne's Disease (OJD)
- Ovine Pulmonary Adenomatosis (OPA)

This wonderful selection of acronyms has a few things in common that make them a natural grouping – all cause thin, wasting sheep which results in high culling rates, reduces the useful lifespan of a ewe or tup and higher replacement costs. They also offer us big challenges in terms of diagnosis.

The most cost effective and successful way to identify the presence of these diseases in the flock is to test skinny ewes that have no other excuse to be skinny. These are the most likely animals in the flock to have a disease issue brewing. So if you do have a group of skinny girls that don't fit with the rest of the flock, let's test them! It's a great way to check for anything murky lurking under the surface that could be holding back your flock's performance.

Blakesley Show

Blakesley show is fast approaching, meaning summer is only just around the corner! We would like to invite all our clients to come and see us at our stand near the main arena. This year the show will take place on Saturday 3rd August from 10am with plenty of entertainment organised through the day. Come along to see the team for a chat, refreshments and a chance to play our infamous Towcester Farm Vets game!



Congratulations to Becca!

We are delighted to announce that Becca gave birth to a beautiful baby girl in March! Both Becca and her husband are thoroughly enjoying the delights and challenges of being new parents and are very grateful for all the good wishes we have passed on from so many of you.

New team members!

We are very excited to introduce two new members of the farm team who have joined us recently.

Katie Platts has been working in a mixed practice doing predominantly farm work for the last few years. Having arrived in the thick of it in March many of you have already met Katie who has a strong interest in bull fertility, young stock and nutrition and also brings with her the obligatory farm vet spaniel in the form of her dog, Rolo!

We are also very pleased to announce that **Emil Popescu** is joining us on a permanent basis as a TB tester, having already spent the Spring with us. Emil graduated in 2014 from the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine in Iasi, Romania and having worked on a Danish pig farm as farm manager, moved to the UK in 2018. We have no doubt you'll welcome both our new team members with the usual measures of warmth and humour we'd expect!



Camelid Cria Care

We would like to wish all our camelid owners a happy and healthy unpacking season! Whilst we hope everything runs smoothly, we are always at the end of the phone if needed.

Whilst many alpacas and llamas give birth unaided, it is always sensible to have kit on farm in case assistance is required. Simple items such as gloves, lubricant, hand wash, navel iodine dips, towels, cria jackets and a weigh scale are good items to have at hand.

Most camelids give birth in the morning so any ladies giving birth in the late afternoon or evening should be monitored closely in case of any problems.

As with all farm species, ensuring crias get sufficient levels of colostrum as soon as possible after unpacking is essential. Failure of passive transfer (FPT) occurs when crias do not get enough colostrum and the important antibodies it contains, putting the cria at severe risk of infections.

It is vital to try and identify sick cria quickly to allow for prompt treatment - weighing a cria daily for the first 2-3 weeks of life helps as weight loss or failure to gain weight is often an early warning sign of a problem.

If we suspect FPT – often following the arrival of a premature cria, prolonged birth with or without intervention or a dam with poor milk supply - a simple blood sample from the cria once over 24 hours of age can identify if FPT has occurred. If you have access to frozen plasma we can perform a plasma transfusion to correct this, giving the cria the best chance of not contracting a potentially life threatening infection later on. Plasma is also really useful if we are faced with a really poorly cria which has already succumbed to an infection.

Without plasma, whilst antibiotics and intensive care are still helpful the prognosis is likely poorer. Plasma can be acquired for future use at our annual camelid blood drive, our next session will be in early 2020.

Beat BVD with Biosecurity!

Our BVD control programme is still enjoying great success! New herds are engaging in BVD control and signing up to the national eradication scheme, BVDFree, all the time which is fantastic! For lots of people, we are delighted to regularly see a clear annual test showing that BVD is not on their farm. Whilst we love clear check tests, it is very easy to become complacent when this has happened for a few years on the run.

Unfortunately for us all, BVD is alive and well. In the last two months we have found 12 PIs, all in herds that have a clear check test in the past, don't buy in many animals but most importantly don't vaccinate.

These herds have seen a range of problems from abortions and poor fertility to poor performance in youngstock. We also have a herd that is currently dealing with BVD infection in sheep after it spread from the cattle.

Whilst this is rare, BVD can cross to sheep and this flock has seen problems with abortions and poorly performing persistently infected lambs as well as issues in the cattle.

So, whilst we are always delighted to find farms with no BVD problem, the past couple of months have definitely highlighted the importance of protecting farms that are free from disease!

These are our top tips:

1. Vaccination is a really important tool in protecting the herd. We advise all breeding herds to vaccinate to protect against unforeseen biosecurity breakdowns. Only this week a client of ours was faced with the unexpected arrival in his field of someone else's animal!
2. Be very careful when buying in animals – especially pregnant animals. Speak to us about appropriate testing and quarantine of bought in animals and ALWAYS check the status of any calves born from bought in pregnant animals to avoid nasty surprises!
3. Keep going with the annual check test – if a problem occurs, the quicker we can pick it up, the quicker we can be on top of the problem!