A mild but wet winter…

A mild winter is great for not having to break the ice in water troughs and avoiding frozen toes but not so good at killing those pesky parasites and bacteria that the cold weather usually deals with quite successfully. Hopefully the weather has made things easier and not harder. Mel.

Flock health plans

A flock health plan is seen by many farmers as a necessary evil required for farm assurance schemes. This should not be the case. The main value of a plan is in helping to prevent and reduce disease. As such, a health plan can increase profits for the farmer and improve the welfare of animals. Complying with regulations should be a secondary effect. There is nothing worse than finding dead animals and having to keep treating sick ones. There is nothing better for morale and job satisfaction, than to have a healthy flock. Spending an hour with one of our vets to discuss your current protocols could, in the long term, save time and money. We may highlight topics that you had not considered a potential problem and between us we can devise up to date treatment plans for common ailments and quarantine procedures for bought in stock.

NEW PRICE FOR WORM EGG COUNTS

The worm egg count offer has come to an end but we are keeping the cost low to encourage regular sampling and avoid unnecessary wormer usage.

Individual animal £9.50 + VAT
Pooled sample (up to 10 samples) £12.00 + VAT

(we will be honouring any currently active offers but not starting any new 'groups of 4')

BEWARE! We have continued to see worm cases throughout the winter months due to the mild weather. We recommend regular pooled worm egg counts - please send 5-10 samples in individual bags and we will pool them to get a group average.

BARREN EWE CHECK

If the number of barren ewes at scanning was greater than you had expected/hoped, it could be due to Toxoplasmosis. We recommend investigating if your barren rates are over 2%. One of our vets could take blood samples from 6-10 barren ewes to check Toxoplasma antibody levels using the MSD (drug company) subsidised ‘barren ewe check’ service (for flocks of over 100 ewes) - MSD pay the laboratory fees so you just pay for the vet call out (or bring them to the surgery to save a visit fee) and blood sampling fee.

NB Only Toxoplasmosis is checked using this subsidised service.
Infectious causes of sheep lameness

Lameness is so common in most flocks that some farmers regard it as a ‘fact of life,’ meaning that sometimes, lame animals are overlooked. It is thought that 15% of the national flock is lame at any one time with scald and footrot making up 79% of the cases. Not only is lameness a significant welfare problem, it can also affect profitability and growth rates. This article looks at the most common infectious causes of lameness.

**Scald**
This is infection and inflammation of the skin between the digits. It is caused by bacteria found in the environment, in mud, faeces and soil, and is associated with long wet grass in the summer months and housing animals on straw.

The recommended treatment is antibiotic spray eg. Cyclospray (NOT antiseptic spray from farm stores). A footbath (zinc sulphate 10%) can be used for scald – all four feet must be in the footbath for 2 minutes and then left on dry standing for approx. 30 minutes post dipping.

**Footrot**
This disease is a progression on from scald, caused by the same bacteria and results in separation of the horn beginning in the area when the interdigital skin meets the horn. There is a rotten smell with dirty greyish, cheese-like debris. The condition is more prevalent in warm, wet weather.

The recommended treatment is antibiotic injection eg. Alamycin LA and anti-inflammatory pain relief eg. Metacam. There is a footrot vaccine available called ‘Footvax’ which is both curative and preventative. We recommend twice yearly dosing often with one dose close to housing.

**FOOT BATHING**
This no longer a recommended treatment for footrot or CODD and should only be used as a preventative measure. Scald can be treated with footbathing but requires the correct product at the correct concentration and sheep must have sufficient contact time for footbathing to be effective.

**Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis (Codd)**
This is known as the ‘new virulent footrot’ and is caused by a spirochete bacteria, similar to the bacteria that cause digital dermatitis in cattle. The lesions start at the coronary band and spread down the hoof, rapidly detaching the horn. There is no rotten smell as with footrot.

Affected animals should be treated with injection antibiotics eg. Alamycin LA and anti-inflammatory pain relief eg. Metacam.

**Treatment of infectious causes of foot lameness**
Prompt treatment of clinical cases is crucial. If cases of scald are detected and treated quickly the cure rate is higher, and there is much less chance of the disease progressing to footrot. Ideally, affected ewes should be picked out for treatment on a daily basis; this will decrease the overall number of ewes that need to be treated and the total amount of drug used. The most recent advice also recommends NOT foot trimming cases of footrot or CODD – trimming often removes horn that is protecting underlying sensitive tissue and/or tissue that could potentially recover, speeding up the healing process.

**Control of Infectious Foot Lameness**
- whole flock vaccination programme with Footvax
- cull of chronic cases (any animal that has had more than one case of footrot in one year).
- footbath all bought in animals in zinc sulphate (10%) and quarantine them for 4 weeks. Buying from footrot free farms is preferable.
- handling pens and equipment should be kept clean