

SHEEP NEWS



Summer 2021

Farm walks have resumed with covid restrictions lifting! Remember to pop your faecal samples in to us for regular wecs!

Drove sheep club

We are very grateful to our wonderful hosts for a very interesting farm walk on the 6th July- our first post lockdown! We hope to meet in person going forward and will be planning our next meeting for the Autumn/winter once harvest is out of the way! If you are interested in learning more about the benefits Drove sheep club membership has to offer please get in touch.

Sadly, no photos were taken of the flock as they were camera shy! However, the suckler herd were more obliging, including Tom the stabilizer bull!



Drove Farm Vets
SHEEP
CLUB

Mastitis: Risks and Prevention

Mastitis is very costly to the sheep industry and is ranked as one of the most important diseases affecting ewes. Treatment costs are increased and lamb growth rates reduced. Mastitis occurs when there is infection of the mammary gland causing inflammation, with over 30 bacterial species identified in sheep. Additionally, the virus maedi visna (MV) can also cause mastitis. Therefore, should incidence rates increase in your flock, it is worth discussing this with your vet.

Mastitis can present in many different ways, and in some cases clinical signs are not apparent. Physical signs include heat, swelling in the udder, altered secretions, palpable intramammary masses (IMM) or a hard udder. In some instances, ewes appear lame on their hind legs due to the pain caused with mastitis. Severe cases can turn gangrenous due to bacterial toxins. In these cases, the udder may slough and the ewe survives, but unfortunately death is still a possibility. In subclinical infections, decreased milk yield and poor lamb growth rates may be the only signs of infection. Checking individual udder health can help identify these subclinical or chronic infections. IMM or abscesses are suggestive of chronic mastitis and can rupture and spread infection within the udder. When one ewe has mastitis, the flock is at increased risk due to its contagious and transmissible nature. Identifying and treating individual cases promptly and effectively could decrease the risk of spread.

Mastitis risk factors

- **Nutrition**- well nourished ewes are better able to fight infection. Under feeding of protein in pregnancy increases the risk of acute mastitis in lactation. Inadequate dietary protein > reduced mammary development > inadequate milk supply for lambs. Hungry lambs can cause teat trauma which can lead to mastitis. The same is true for inadequate energy. There is some suggestion that Selenium and vitamin A deficiencies increase the risk of mastitis however more research is required.
- **Body Condition Score**- Low BCS (<3) is linked to subclinical and clinical mastitis for similar reasons as above.
- **Hygiene**- good hygiene reduces the risk & spread of infectious diseases. Wet & dirty bedding with high stocking densities is a recipe for disaster. Contaminated hands or clothing can spread infections between ewes.
- **Lumps**- Ewes with IMM should be considered for culling because they are a reservoir of infection and can be poor milk producers.
- **Cross suckling of lambs**- this spreads infection & is likely to occur if a lamb is not receiving enough milk from its mother.
- **Age of ewe**- ewes over 4 years old tend to have a higher rate of mastitis & tend to be of lower BCS or suffering other health issues. Maiden ewes or gimmers have been shown to take longer to feed their lambs > more risk of teat damage.
- **Maedi visna**- this virus can cause mastitis (lesions & hardening of the udder) amongst other symptoms and spreads rapidly through the flock, persisting for life. It can be detected by blood sampling & some flocks partake in the MV accreditation scheme.
- **Teat lesions**- the ewes mastitis defence mechanism is compromised by damaged teat ends as they create an entry point for bacteria. These are often caused by hungry lambs or multiple birth ewes.
- **Teat position and udder conformation**- good udder conformation is associated with decreased risk for mastitis. Teat position, angle & udder drop are relevant. Find more information at 'AHDB understanding mastitis in ewes'.
- **Indoor vs outdoor lambing**- risk increases the longer the ewes & lambs remain housed, particularly when stocking density is high.
- **Weaning**- monitor for mastitis after weaning paying particular attention to both ewe & lamb nutrition for optimum health. Use the ewes BCS, lambs DLWG & feed availability to decide on a weaning date.

Prevention

Prevention of mastitis relies on managing the above risk factors. For example:

- Maintain BCS at 3+
- Supplement thin and older ewes
- Consider culling older ewes or those with poor conformation
- Checking the udder for abnormal masses to identify chronic mastitis
- Separate ewes with mastitis from the rest of the flock to reduce transmission
- Keep ewes and lambs in same field/shed before, during, after lambing as they have grown accustomed to the bacteria in that area
- Ensuring shelter during bad weather
- Testing for MV
- Good hygiene
- Reduce nutrition for newly weaned ewes for 2 weeks to dry them off

To discuss mastitis further please get in touch on 01793 501 499.