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OCTOBER 2021 NEWSLETTER

UPDATES FROM THE SHEEP VETERINARY SOCIETY AUTUMN CONFERENCE

Jonathan recently attended the Sheep Veterinary Society autumn conference at Cheltenham and presented cases of tickborne disease encountered within the practice over the past two years, as well as our success in reducing Spectam for lambs. The overall programme of talks and speakers was excellent – highlights included:

- **Phil Stocker, NSA CEO**, gave an update on the current picture of sheep farming within the UK and the upcoming challenges, opportunities and requirements for sheep farmers to access the **replacement for the single farm payment**. Key to this is a focus on improving performance, sustainability, health and welfare through reducing our reliance on antibiotics and anthelmintics (wormers) and making significant reductions in the rate of lameness and endemic iceberg diseases such as MV, Johnes, OPA and CLA. Funding will be available to cover the costs of individual vet visits to help achieve these goals.
- **Rizvan Khalid, Euro Quality Lambs Ltd**, and **Professor Lord Trees** discussed **Halal slaughter** within the sheep industry, including non-stun slaughter. This is an important subject matter, as 20-25% of sheep meat consumed within the UK is eaten by Muslims, who only constitute 5% of the national population. There were a lot of misconceptions within the room regarding Halal, of which Mr. Khalid did a great job of breaking down and explaining these. Ultimately electrical head-only stunning is permissible within Islam (other methods are not), but there have been barriers and mis-trust between the Islamic community and slaughterhouses regarding how stunning has been performed, leading to year-on-year increases of non-stun slaughter. Over the past few years however, the Islamic community, AHDB, government and other stakeholders have come together regarding this issue, which has led to a recent Halal Assurance Scheme being rolled out.
- **Ben Strugnell** presented an interesting case of “**neuroaxonal dystrophy (NAD) in Swaledales**” – a new previously unrecognised disease identified on a flock in County Durham. This disease results in neurological signs, ultimately leading to affected animals going off their legs and dying. It was likely that a **genetic abnormality** was the cause, due to a particular breeding line of animals being affected. Following genotype testing in Switzerland, the presence of two different genetic mutations was found and this has recently been published in the scientific community. Following this, **human medics at UCL and Great Ormond Street Hospital** have pursued the case, as NAD is recognised in humans, particularly children, and is always fatal. They are hoping that these sheep will provide an excellent model for researching this condition and ultimately lead to a cure in humans.
- **Guda van der Burgt** reported the birth of deformed lambs and high neonatal mortality on a large organic lowland sheep flock, diagnosed as **congenital chondro-dysplasia**. A common factor was feeding **red-clover** silage during pregnancy, following a re-seed from grass/white clover mix over the preceding years, however many other vets in the room reported no such problems associated with feeding red clover. There was also a potential link with **low manganese and copper** on the farm, however ewes not fed red-clover but that were low in manganese and copper, did not encounter problems.

At the end of the meeting Jonathan was elected onto the SVS committee for a 3-year term. He will be given a sub-committee to sit on and ultimately advise policy makers on important and relevant matters to the industry.

ACORN POISONING

It is around now that we start seeing cases of acorn poisoning – last year was particularly bad so we hope this year will be somewhat kinder. Poisoning usually occurs after storms, when winds blow down a lot of the acorns. Acorns contain a toxin which is converted to tannic acid in the rumen, which then causes serious effects on the gastrointestinal tract and kidneys. Signs appear 3–7 days after ingestion and show initially as constipation and straining, progressing to foetid tarry faeces, anorexia, bloat, swelling of the lower body and usually death due to kidney failure. Cows in the middle third of pregnancy can have abortions or malformed calves if they survive. **Treatment** is supportive, by fluids and antibiotic cover in case of secondary infection, however in reality it is almost always fatal, so prevention is vital. **Prevention** relies on removing cattle and sheep from areas with high acorn fall via fencing off or moving animals out of at-risk fields when there are storms.

POOR PERFORMANCE IN LAMBS? Over the past 6-8 weeks we have investigated several flocks with sub-optimal performance in their lamb crop. In most instances, this has been down to a **vitamin B12/Cobalt deficiency**. Where this deficiency is found in isolation, the most cost-effective option is either a cobalt drench (however this only lasts 2-3 weeks so requires repeated administration), or a relatively new product developed in New Zealand and available via an import licence – **Smartshot B12**. Unlike a drench, Smartshot injection provides sufficient B12 for **up to 6 months**. It is recommended to be given to lambs no later than at weaning to achieve maximum benefit, as once cobalt deficiency takes hold there is usually some degree of lifelong ill-thrift, even with appropriate treatment. There is also the option of **Smartshot B12 Plus SE** where concurrent selenium deficiency is identified, which may provide an easier alternative to a bolus. Speak to Jonathan for any further information.



REMINDER TO ALL DAIRY FARMERS – you need to have your Johnes' Disease Management Plan Annual Review completed by **31st December** (not immediately, but your farm has a funny habit of creeping up on us!). This requires another risk assessment on Veterinary Advisor (Martin, Eiske, Jonathan). Please book an appointment through your branch surgery in plenty of time to ensure you do not miss the deadline.



PD YOUR SUCKLER COWS NOW - For economic efficiency it is crucial that a suckler cow produces one calf per year. AHDB data shows that the total cost of production for English suckler herds is around £450-£800/cow/year. This means that any **empty cows cost between £1.23 - £2.19/day, or £37 - £66/month**. Can you afford not knowing whether your cows are in calf? With the use of our ultrasound scanners, we are able to diagnose pregnancy from **one month after service**, allowing you to know your situation sooner rather than later, and take any action that may be required.

ORDER YOUR SCABIVAX NOW
Scabivax Forte is a live virus vaccine for the active immunisation of ewes and lambs against Orf. Immunity develops within 4-8 weeks of vaccination and is effective for 12 months. It should **NOT be given within 7 weeks of lambing**, so plan ahead. *The vaccine should not be used on farms or in flocks where Orf is not a problem.*

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