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JULY 2022 NEWSLETTER

MEDICINE TRAINING MEETING (RED TRACTOR REQUIREMENT)

We are running another **medicine training day on Wednesday 20th July at North Tawton Rugby Club**. The course will run from **10:30am to 3pm**, pasty lunch and other refreshments provided throughout the day. The cost for this course is £60 + VAT for first attendant from the farm and £30 + VAT for any additional attendants. This course has been approved by Red Tractor and everyone will receive a certificate of attendance. **It is now a Red Tractor requirement that at least one person holds a certificate of competence in administering medicines.** Please register your interest with any branch.



TIME FOR YOUR BULL & HEIFER 'MOT'

For spring-calving herds, your bulls will be back to work again soon. Now is the time for their "MOT" to ensure they are in good order and fertile – can you really afford to run the risk of them firing blanks?

An **average bull costs approx. £2000/year** to keep yet should only **work for nine to twelve weeks a year**. To justify this cost, it is therefore crucial that they are working well when required; if a bull only sires 30 calves this equates to £55 per calf born, but this reduces to £33 per calf if 50 calves are sired. A **fully fertile** stock bull can achieve a **90% pregnancy rate after a nine-week service period at a bull ratio of 1:50 cows**, assuming the cows are disease free and normally cycling. You should also aim to have **at least 60% of cows calve in the first three weeks** of the calving period. Published research often finds that around one in three stock bulls are unable to achieve this target, resulting in fewer cows getting in calf and a protracted calving period, resulting in a significant reduction in profitability. A bull breeding soundness examination aims to identify sub-fertile bulls in **advance** of the breeding season; sperm production takes around 8 weeks to complete so doing it **now** allows time to treat the subfertility if possible or arrange for a replacement bull.



The examination consists of a full physical exam by the vet, including body condition score, locomotion, teeth, legs and feet, before moving onto the reproductive organs. Here, the prepuce and penis are examined for any damage or discharge, scrotal circumference measured (as size correlates with sperm production) and the testes palpated to ensure there are no abnormalities. Assuming no problems are found at this stage, an ejaculate will be taken by electro-ejaculation to examine sperm concentration and viability under the microscope.

The **heifer MOT** involves **pelvic measurement** and ensuring they are cycling ahead of breeding. 1 in 20 heifers have a small pelvis which can cause calving difficulties, 2 or 3 in 20 will be marginal. **Why do this?** The short-term aim is to remove heifers with abnormally small or misshapen pelvises. These can then be fattened before ever entering the breeding herd, and avoid costly exercises such as caesarean sections or dead calves/injured heifers associated with difficult calvings. The long-term aim is to select away from breeding replacement heifers with narrow pelvises (highly heritable) and remove those genetics from the herd.

ALTERNATIVE & ADJUNCTIVE TB TESTS? LET'S GET SERIOUS ABOUT TB

The single intradermal comparative cervical tuberculin test (SICCT) – aka skin test – is the statutory test for *Mycobacterium bovis* (TB) in the UK. This has many limitations, the main being a low sensitivity, where by there are actually many false-negative animals. The sensitivity is reported at 50-80%, depending on the progression of the disease and when the results are interrupted at “standard”. A sensitivity of 80% means that 20% of infected cattle would be missed by the test. The test has a specificity of 99.98% however, meaning an average of only one false positive result for every 5,000 uninfected cattle tested.

If we are serious about eradicating TB, then alongside improved biosecurity on farm, wildlife control and cattle vaccination (clinical trials are now underway), we should be looking at alternative tests to detect and remove those animals that evade the skin test and remain in the herd to infect other cattle.

The gamma test is sometimes used by APHA as an adjunctive test. This has a lower specificity (more false positives) but a higher sensitivity (less false negatives) than the skin test.

Alternative commercially available tests have recently arrived, such as the Enferplex test and the Actiphage test. To be able to use them however, you must gain prior approval from APHA and first perform a gamma test. The cost of testing is undertaken by the farmer and any positive animals do not receive compensation. You do not have to cull positive animals, however you will not gain TB-free status until they have been culled – a case of APHA having their cake and eating it! Why would you want to do these tests then?

The Enferplex test is an antibody test that uses 11 antigens. The number of antigens that the animal tests positive for gives that animal a risk status for TB. This provides us with tools to manage TB: when appropriate moderate and high-risk animals are culled from the herd (e.g. at end of lactation) and are carefully managed before this point – this is the same approach that is taken with Johne's disease control and eradication which is starting to yield excellent results. The actiphage test makes use of viruses that have adapted to attack TB. This attack releases DNA from TB cells which can then be detected. It is performed on a blood sample and can detect less than 10 viable TB cells per ml of blood.

As has been widely reported previously, a combination of alternative testing was used on the Gatcombe Herd near Seaton to achieve TB-free status after several years of being under restrictions. However, once TB-free, APHA blocked the on-going use of these tests and after sometime the herd once again had a TB breakdown. Knowing that there are tools available to help monitor and effectively control TB, yet the toolbox they are kept in is locked by APHA, is incredibly frustrating. Together with a client we are in the process of meeting with industry leaders and MPs to raise this issue. The goal is to have APHA remove the blocks that are currently in place to allow us to “get serious” about TB control and eradication. If you would like more information or would like to lend your weight to this process, please get in touch with Jonathan.

OUR SMALLHOLDERS CLUB IS STARTING! We have our first social meeting on the afternoon of Wednesday 27th July (venue to be confirmed). Rya and Clare are excited to kick off by discussing common infectious diseases of small ruminants (sheep and goats), control strategies and vaccination protocols. This is a relaxed discussion group with future plans to cover other aspects of farm species care. The club is open to anyone to join, but will be targeting issues that animal groups of less than 50 are likely to encounter. Looking forward to seeing you all!



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