



SHROPSHIRE FARM NEWS

WHAT MAKES A RESILIENT FARM BUSINESS?

You will probably have read a lot in the farming press during the last 2 years about the need to re-evaluate your business to make it resilient. In the main they are talking about being able to survive in periods of volatile prices be it for milk, beef, sheep or pigs. For many people they read that as cutting costs to the bone and that is certainly a big part of resilience, however resilience is also the ability to be adaptable, to be able to free up capital when you need it and to be able to be as profitable as possible in those periods when prices are good. To be resilient you have got to have a really good understanding of the things you are good at on your farm. At a recent talk I heard a speaker from the US talking about how they divide their dairy farm business into three separate components, a forage growing sector, a heifer rearing sector and a milking platform. They then cost out the separate enterprises to see if they are truly competitive in each. Knowing the costs of each of these 3 key enterprises allows them to address areas where they under-perform until all 3 sectors are sustainable. For example, the rearing costs per heifer must be at least 30% less than what it would cost to buy a freshly calved heifer on the open market. Equally the forage growing enterprise must achieve good yields per acre at a cost less than that of buying the forage in.

Obviously this is more applicable in big units but in terms of profit, the same thinking could be applied in any size or type of livestock farm.

On any given livestock farm the production and utilization of forages per hectare are going to be key drivers of profitability. How many acres are in use for grazing, do you know how much grass/maize /hectare you grow? What is its quality like? and can you store it properly to retain most of its value? Could you grow more by better grazing rotations or by adding lime or by using fertiliser strategically? Do you need to renew the pasture or make it more accessible for grazing? If you are doing the land management part well then the next two enterprises, the youngstock rearing and the milking herd, should be easier because you have good quality forages to work with.

Once calves are on the ground you need to aim to rear youngstock to calve early with minimal losses. Youngstock are most efficient at converting kg food to kg bodyweight when they are at a young age so getting good growth rates from a young age and keeping them growing, will reduce the overall cost of rearing. 50 heifers calving at 30 months rather than 24 months

will be less productive over their lifetime, add at least £3,600 to your annual costs (only allowing £1/day costs uk average is actually over £2/day) and will take up 50 animal spaces for half the year that could be devoted to anything else.

Resilience in the livestock part of the business will always be better with healthy, fertile stock rather than anything less. We have clients who have doubled cow numbers, invested in infrastructure and seen their milk yields rise and their vet bills drop. The message being it is disease and lack of cow comfort not vet costs that are holding most herds back.

Having good fertility allows you to spend less on semen but also be more selective with breeding choices. In periods of low milk price this should mean you can switch to more beef semen and rear fewer heifers to preserve cash, in periods of better milk price, good fertility will give you the option to produce more milk or to sell surplus heifers when they are at a premium. It also allows you to consider the advantages of block calving.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- Keep investing in good nutritional advice and have a clear fertility plan.
- Maximise forage yields and utilization in particular grazed grass.
- Minimise disease costs and invest in healthy stock.

This will protect the business when prices are poor but also allows you to push cows on further when the payback is there. As we face into the grazing season for 2017 we hope that prices and weather are favourable for all our livestock farmers and that the measures needed to make your business are made easier.

Tim

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Coccidiosis in Lambs

Background

Coccidiosis is a parasitic disease of the intestine which most commonly affects lambs when they are 4 to 6 weeks old. The parasite which causes the disease belongs to the *Eimeria* group of protozoa. This family of parasites contains many individual strains, of which just two are capable of causing disease in sheep. The strains causing disease in lambs are totally specific to sheep and are not the same as those causing coccidiosis in calves; there is no crossover between the two diseases. Unfortunately, almost all adult ewes will be carrying the parasite in low numbers, and although they will have developed a level of natural immunity to the clinical disease, they can act as a source of infection to their lambs. The oocysts ('eggs') are also capable of surviving over winter in buildings and on pasture. As such, one year's crop of lambs can act as a source of infection for lambs born 12 months later.

Transmission

Lambs will contract the disease wherever there are a high number of coccidial oocysts in the environment. This could be inside sheds or loose housing where there has been a recent build up of contaminated material, or where oocysts left by ewes or lambs previously housed there have persisted on the walls and floor. Large numbers of oocysts can be found in wet environments, so leaky indoor pipes and water troughs are an absolute haven for the disease. Lambs can also pick up the disease after being turned onto outdoor paddocks where high numbers of oocysts have been left by the previous year's crop, especially when stocking density is high. Within days, the parasite begins to replicate itself inside the lambs at a phenomenal rate, resulting in infected animals shedding colossal numbers of oocysts in the faeces. As such, the number of oocysts in the

environment spirals rapidly upwards once lambs have begun to be affected, and the disease quickly spreads.

Symptoms

The clinical signs of this disease can vary between cases. The 'typical' symptoms of lambs affected with coccidiosis are rapid weight loss and a gaunt, tucked up appearance. As the parasite progresses in destroying the lining of the intestines, lambs will develop profuse diarrhoea, sometimes containing fresh blood. Excessive straining can be seen even when no diarrhoea is produced, sometimes leading to rectal prolapse.

The disease has a fairly low rate of mortality, but is likely to affect a very large percentage of the group to one extent or another. Not all lambs in the affected flock will show all of the symptoms above, but during a coccidiosis outbreak it is likely that even the lambs not showing obvious signs of the disease will suffer weight loss and reduced appetite. In severe cases, chronic scarring of the intestinal wall will occur, and growth rates will fail to recover even in the weeks or months following clinical recovery.

Diagnosis

Sheep, like cattle, are capable of carrying other strains of coccidia which do not cause disease. As such, finding a few coccidial oocysts on a faecal egg count slide does not necessarily mean that the animal is carrying anything dangerous. However, when the numbers of oocysts seen during a faecal egg count are extremely high (sometimes > 100,000 per gram of faeces), and lambs are showing symptoms consistent with coccidiosis as well as being of typical age and history for the disease, then a presumptive diagnosis can be made. If there is any doubt, external labs are able to accurately detect whether the oocytes found on the faecal egg count are of a disease-causing strain.

Suspicion of this disease is normally first aroused by reduced growth rates and a few lambs showing clinical signs. At this age (4-6 weeks) the only other common thing to be causing such symptoms is the *Nematodirus* worm; rapid faecal sampling for in-house testing should be able to confirm the presence of either, or both of these parasites.

Prevention

Management practices which reduce the likelihood of lambs contracting this disease revolve around good colostrum management and environmental hygiene. Thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting sheds between batches of lambs (particularly when young lambs are going into a shed previously occupied by older ones) is vital. The use of a good disinfectant while cleaning will kill a large number of the dormant oocysts, while using a steam cleaner on the walls and floor is also shown to be very effective. Letting the shed dry completely between batches will help, as the parasite survives better in the damp.

Outdoors, attempts should be made not to overstock, and avoid grazing young lambs on land where clinical coccidiosis was present the previous year if possible.

On farms with a history of the disease, medicated feed containing decoquinatone can be prescribed where the disease cannot be controlled with management practices.

Treatment

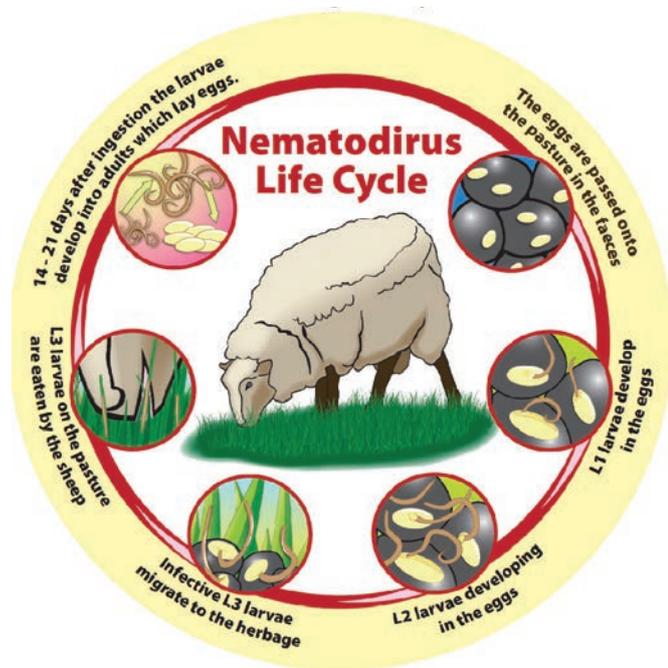
There are two commercially available products licensed for the treatment and prevention of clinical coccidiosis in lambs, marketed as Baycox and Vecoxan. While they both belong to the same family of drugs, their properties and uses vary slightly. Traditionally, Baycox is the drug of choice for quickly addressing an established coccidiosis problem, while Vecoxan is generally considered the preferable preventative treatment, promoting the development of a better long-term natural immunity. However, independent trials carried out on these two drugs have produced results which challenge these generalisations. As such, if your stock are suffering from coccidiosis, it is best to make a treatment decision with your vet based on an assessment of your individual situation, rather than jumping to the drug you have always used in the past.

As with wormers, resistance to anticoccidial drugs can and will develop on your farm, so it is always best to control the disease with management practices rather than medicines where possible.

John

NEMATODIROSIS... a summary

Host stage 14 days



Free-Living stage
(May take 8-9 months)

Development slower and usually too cold before L3's are ready, so they sit dormant until the following spring

When is the risk?

Frustratingly the highest risk period will vary slightly from year to year making it difficult to counteract. There are two significant factors to consider:

1. **Environmental conditions.** If the weather suddenly changes from cold frosty mornings to mild, warmer spring weather a mass hatching of parasites on the pasture occurs
2. **Lamb age/weaning.** If this mass hatching occurs around the same time that lambs are beginning to consume significant amounts of grass (6-12 weeks) then the risk will be very high

What other risks are there?

In addition to the two critical factors above there are other factors which will increase the challenge faced by lambs:

- Grazing lambs on the same pasture which they were grazed on last Spring
- Presence of other parasites e.g. coccidiosis
- Other stress, triplets, fostered lambs, etc.

Clinical Signs

- Sudden onset profuse diarrhoea
- Faecal staining of tail and perineum
- Dull/depressed lambs
- Lambs which stop sucking
- Gaunt condition
- Dehydration
- Rapid loss of body condition
- Lambs congregating around water to rehydrate

Why should I be worried?

First and foremost nematodirus will impact on the welfare of the lambs. Nematodirus also comes with a significant cost. If all of the risk factors come together and present a high challenge then up to 5% of the lamb crop may die. Even if you are able to avoid deaths in a nematodirus outbreak the lambs will lose condition and will take longer and cost more to finish.

Diagnosis

- Once worms are ingested they takes 2-4 weeks to begin producing eggs so faecal egg counts are not helpful for acute disease however they should be used to monitor response to treatment.
- Presentation/clinical signs
- Post Mortem

Treatment

SCOPS recommend that, if treatment is required, a group 1 (white/1-BZ) wormer should be used. When treating lambs weigh them and dose accurately to ensure that treatment is effective and to help protect anthelmintics from resistance. Faecal worm egg counts 7-10 days after treatment are vital for determining efficacy of the treatment. We have some very competitively priced Endospec in stock ready for use should you need.

Prevention

Monitor the **parasite forecast** for your region so you are ready to act at the right time and prevent acute disease. This can be accessed on the SCOPS and NADIS websites and should be checked daily during periods of high risk. Local knowledge on risk is invaluable and so you should keep in contact with your local vets and SQPs. Where possible avoid grazing lambs on the same pasture on consecutive years.

Alistair

HUSKVAC – BACK TO THE FUTURE?

Huskvac is a live lungworm vaccine given orally to calves before turnout. Calves require two doses pre-turn out and the immunity is subsequently boosted by exposure of small amounts of lungworm on pasture. In most circumstances then the calf will develop lifelong protective immunity to lungworm. What's not to like? Well in the last twenty years the use of Huskvac (prev known as Dictol) has declined as wormers, especially the ivomec type have become cheaper and more convenient in terms of pour on application. This is because it can be cheaper to use these products across the summer to get good control of lungworm and of course you are getting control of gutworms at the same time. At the same time there has been no reduction and probably an increase in the number of lungworm outbreaks especially in adult animals.

In the long run, however, indiscriminate use of these wormers can lead only to one end point, – development of resistant worms.

Just think what the consequences for your farm would be if you had worms in your cattle that you couldn't treat. So, just as we have been having conversations about reducing antibiotics, we also need to start thinking about alternative ways of managing worms. There is a lot of potential in terms of identifying animals with genetic resistance to worms (where

animals still pick up worms but can thrive with high burdens) but we also need to be thinking of reducing the selection pressure of wormers by reducing their use.

So with this in mind Huskvac, which is a very old vaccine, is an incredibly useful tool. Because lungworm infection causes such damage so quickly (it can easily cause death within 2 weeks of infection) not protecting against infection will inevitably lead to losses, both deaths and longterm lung damage. By contrast gutworms cause problems step by step, as numbers build up so you have more time to safely assess performance. In addition the gut can repair itself whereas the the lungs are very poor at doing so.

Using Huskvac gives you a safety net that will then allow you to use a targeted, informed, wait and see approach to gutworms. On many farms you may be able to drastically reduce the amount of wormer you use.

Its not the cheapest vaccine nor the easiest vaccine to administer but it is sustainable, it is effective and for such an old vaccine it is the future.

Tim



Why MOT your Bull?



A fertile bull → tighter calving pattern



12 week vs. 21 week calving period	12	21
Weaning date per calf	0wks	+4.5wks
Weaning weight per calf (*1kg DLWG)	+31.5kg	
Value of weaning weight per calf (*180p/kg)	+£56.70	



Its that time of year again whether you are a beef herd, all year round calving herd or block calving spring dairy herd getting ready to source bulls for the serving period in May/June. It is vital that your bull is up to the job. Fertile bulls have better conception rates, get more cows in calf in a shorter period and have more fertile daughters. Weeding

out the sub fertile bulls is vital. If you can test your current bull(s) now, you have the opportunity to source a decent replacement in good time.

Semen Testing Bulls is straight forward, takes on average less than an hour for the first bull and around 20 min – half an hour for each subsequent animal depending on set up. We have tested several hundred bulls in the practice over the last 10 years. Every year we find that the failure rate runs at approx. 1 in 4. That is a lot of bulls that are not up to the job. Remember that just because a bull was fertile last year doesn't mean he will be fertile this year. Do you really want to wait until scanning time to find out that it's your turn to be let down this time?

Tim

CONTACT THE PRACTICE TO BOOK IN YOUR BULL'S MOT TODAY

Don't forget with Shropshire Hoofcare we can now tie this in with getting him foot-trimmed at the same time so he really is ready to fire on all cylinders.

TB Update

63 herd tests were carried out in the last month representing a total number of animals tested of 8,185.

There were 0 inconclusives and 4 reactors.

This is one of the busiest times of years for TB testing prior to turnout so please get your test booked in good time.

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