



SHROPSHIRE FARM NEWS

ROD'S RUMINATIONS

Well here goes again, with the usual caveat that whatever I write tends to be a bit retrospective as my task master Sam sets me a deadline of mid-month for you to receive at the beginning of the next. So as I write, Alistair is on his Mozambique trip, sending us pictures etc., but by the time you receive this many of you will already have seen him on his return with tales to tell. I hope he will do a bit for the next newsletter about his experiences out there, and as said before if XLVets are still doing the project before my retirement, it is something I would like to do as my final act of being a vet.

I disappeared off to Dorset at the beginning of the month, with the harvest in abeyance, rain and cold, it feeling more like October. However, the sun appeared again and on my return to Shropshire, (as always seems to happen!), nature had been kind and it looked like harvest had been completed and a lot of ground preparation had also been done ready for it all to start again next year. Maize continues to look fantastic and it doesn't look as if it will be long before that will be cut, even maybe for some by the time this is read. If not too much goes into digesters, then a good crop should ease pressure through the winter.

Which I suppose brings us on to the pressure of falling milk prices yet again. It is no consolation that at least, unlike a couple of years ago, feed prices should be lower, but the squeeze is on again, especially for those that have invested heavily in the past few months. Again, all costs need to be considered, maximising production on what you have has to be the key and that is where disease control, lameness reduction and cell count control will help welfare and milk production, which ultimately affects the bottom line: the amount of milk sold. Monitoring and controlling cow health is a small proportion of the cost of milk production, but will yield rewards in improving margins. We are here to help you in that direction, we need to work together.

Despite all that, a recent survey of dairy farmers, does suggest that there is a greater confidence in the industry than there was two years ago, with plans of expansion despite the price reductions considered by a lot of those surveyed, and an expected increase in profitability. So confidence remains, but perhaps a more controlled marketing strategy is needed. Global markets offer optimism, but the downside is still the threat of TB.

This leads me on to the following topic: the resumption of the badger cull in the two areas that were trialled last year; Somerset and Gloucestershire. Targets are lower this year, between 615-1091 in W.Glos and 316-785 in my old territory of W.Somerset. Improvements have been made to the strategy

Continued overleaf

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AI COURSE

Our AI course in October is now full. If interest is high we will run another one in the near future.

Please speak to Sam P at the practice for more information or to register your interest.

OOH MEDS REQUESTS

Please be aware that if a vet has to make a special trip to the office to dispense medicines out of hours, then a minimum visit fee will apply. As there no facility for payments at the weekend, the pay-at-the-time discount is also lost.

MULTI-DISPENSING OF MEDICINES

Please be aware that medicines dispensed in syringes are subject to the following fees.

1 syringe: £2.50 +VAT

2 syringes: £3.00 +VAT

3 or more syringes: £5.50 +VAT.

PRACTICE OPENING TIMES

Surgery/Pharmacy: Mon-Fri, 8:15am-5:30pm

An on call vet is available on the main number outside of these hours.

We visit Shrewsbury Market every Tuesday morning between 9:30am-12noon. Please place any medicine orders for market by 4pm on Monday to ensure they are at market the following morning.

Shropshire Farm Vets

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From front page

employed last year, and despite legal challenges from the cuddly badger brigade, hopefully the cull will be allowed to happen to show that a combined strategy of cull, test and vaccination can have a positive effect on the control of this devastating disease to the farming community. Interestingly a survey of road kill badgers in Cheshire, an "on the edge" county in terms of disease showed 25% of badgers to be infected with TB. (The type of figures that never get to the national press to emphasise the welfare issues to the badger population as well, not that I am saying badgers with TB run in front of cars). As of this time, we hope the incidence in this practice continues to fall, let's see what happens after housing.

To all those who supported us in the Dragon Boat Race the final figure we took to Severn Hospice was just over £1500, thank you all. Some of the cow onesies have even been seen mounting each other in Mozambique, who knows what Alistair's been teaching them!

We have to say a sad farewell to Raquel, we will miss her sense of humour and brain, but she will stay in touch to help me with my Health Monitor scheme (more to follow).

So back to Dorset, if I extolled the virtues of Norfolk earlier in the year, Dorset exceeds and may even surpass my beloved Devon. From bizarre hat festivals in the town I stayed in to the diversity of farming, the countryside, woodland, rolling hills, ancient and medieval castles and a fantastic coastline. The Jurassic coast is beautiful, a wonderful spectacle (though slowly falling into the sea). We took a boat trip along the



coast to appreciate it better, with all the power of the boat for a fast and bumpy trip back to Lulworth. Unfortunately we did come last in the local pub quiz, but only just, as we joined in halfway through so not a bad effort. Stupidly having said I never go in the sea in this country, and I don't do cold water, I was persuaded to and it was b...y cold, funny how the person who urged me on, "I'll only go in if you do" then didn't!

Enough, I will be back in Dorset again, so much more to see and do. Didn't get around to writing very much of my book on Kilimanjaro but will get around to it soon.

See you soon.

Rod.

CALVING BEEF HEIFERS AT 24 MONTHS

As some of you may have seen in a recent copy of Farmers Weekly, a new study in Northern Ireland has shown the benefit of calving beef heifers down at 24 months rather than at the usual 36 months. The report goes against the general belief that a big, strong heifer will have an easier time calving and be more productive. The study was performed on five commercial beef units and the data collected proves that calving down at 24 months is both achievable and profitable.

Due to the current pressure the beef sector is under it is worth looking at the major points from this study to see whether any of them can be applied to your own farm, particularly if the extra margin of £45 per cow in the herd can be achieved.

Aim to serve heifers at 60-65% mature weight. This would mean they should calve down at 24 months, they would be working earlier and therefore benefit profitability and decrease greenhouse gas emissions.

Select an easy-calving sire. Although they are calving at a younger age the animals will be fitter and leaner. You are likely to have a lower birth-weight calf but benefit will be seen over the heifer's lifetime as she will be more efficient.

Weigh heifers at least every 3 months. It is important to monitor heifer growth rates to ensure that weight targets are being hit. Any animals which are struggling should be split in to other groups where they can be managed.

Selecting replacements at weaning. Target heifers from good cows which have achieved a daily live weight gain of over 1.1kg since birth. Ensure that all fluke and worming treatment is up-to-date.

Ally.

SHEEP LAMENESS

Late summer and winter housing are prime times for sheep to be lame. High stocking densities and weather conditions lend themselves to the spread of infectious disease. Lameness is not only a welfare concern but it causes significant economic impact (one figure from FAI quoting lameness as costing the sheep sector in the UK £24million/year). Many people are aware that the vast majority of lameness can be attributed to footrot and scald however it is definitely worth being able to identify and treat the other causes of lameness – such as contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD), toe granulomas (strawberry toe), white line disease (shelly hoof) etc. Once a diagnosis has been made the next step is knowing what the appropriate course of action is. Below is the five point plan for tackling sheep lameness on a herd level. **Cull:** build resistance by weeding out those that are more susceptible and are likely to pass on susceptibility to their offspring.

Quarantine: reduce the disease challenge associated with bringing new animals into your flock.

Treat: reduce the risk of transfer from animal to animal by treating lame cases quickly.

Avoid: decrease the spread of disease through handling, equipment and underfoot conditions by being clean and vigilant and spreading gravel, woodchips, lime etc.

Vaccinate: build immunity within the flock using whole herd vaccination programmes.

For more information or to discuss lameness within your flock please contact the practice. Emily.



MY FEET ARE KILLING ME

LAMENESS PART 2

In the article last month we considered possible causes of lameness and how they come about. Having some understanding of this is important if we are looking at trying to reduce the incidence of lameness in the herd, with the associated welfare and economic benefits that ensue. As always, prevention is better than cure.

Any attempt at the control of lameness does have its restraints however.

1. The relative difficulties of getting and maintaining a good quality monitoring and recording system.
2. The financial and practical complications of carrying out key aspects of control, especially with regard to claw horn lesions.
3. The lag between initiation of control measures, and appreciable improvements in the levels of lameness.

It does therefore require a sustained period of enthusiasm and motivation from those involved in lameness control to achieve rewarding results, and reap the benefits it will bring.

So, if lameness is not a single disease but more a symptom, the majority of control measures can be directed at:

- Low infection pressure
- Good horn quality and hoof shape
- Low forces on feet, good cow comfort and cow flow
- Early detection and prompt, effective treatment of lame cows

In a lot of cases the first point we will be talking about is digital dermatitis, but a lot of control measures for this will also be relevant for foul in the foot, and similarly points two and three which applies to sole ulceration is also very much relevant for white line disease.

I will deal with treatment next time, if you are still awake!

INFECTIOUS FOOT DISEASE:

- (a) Environmental hygiene is the biggest risk, and this includes inadequate slurry management and cows standing in slurry for long periods. Wet unhygienic conditions, poor ventilation and poor building design are a risk as are rough conditions underfoot, increasing the risk of damage to the interdigital space. Overstocking, poorly maintained yards, tracks and walkways leading to pooling of water and slurry within the buildings.
- (b) Biosecurity – allowing the risk of introduction of disease into the herd. Mixing of groups which are clean and dirty causes infection to spread and this includes the possible spread on fomites such as hoof knives etc.

Therefore control has to be based around keeping feet clean, frequent scraping, especially where faeces will accumulate, along the fronts of the cubicles, water troughs, corners, etc.

This will help to reduce the infective load, and will also minimise the effects of a poor micro-environment around the foot, creating poor foot hygiene. Prompt treatment will also reduce the bacterial load, and thorough disinfection of knives etc. between treatments. The use of footbaths will also have a significant role in control of disease. The layout, frequency of treatment and the product used is also important. Unnecessary mixing or changing of groups will reduce disease spread. As said in last month's article, Digi can be controlled but will probably never be eliminated.

CLAW HORN DISEASE:

As mentioned in the last newsletter, causes for claw horn disease are a lot related to stresses and strains on the foot, especially around calving time when the viability of the digital cushion can be affected.

Therefore the environment of the cow can have a big impact on the incidence of lameness. One has to consider cow comfort, the impact of prolonged standing times on hard surfaces such as collecting yards, the comfort of the cubicles, or inadequate numbers of cubicles so cows can't lie. How is the quality of the surface they are standing on? Is it rough or abrasive, are there loose stones etc. The shearing effects of these surfaces cause pressure forces to the cows foot. Are there sharp turns out of parlours, poor cow flow, poor quality or inappropriate tracks? Wet and dirty environments which soften hooves will also have an impact.

Cows will find straw yards more comfortable than cubicles and one would see a reduction in lameness, again due to the shearing effects on the foot from standing half in cubicles. Poor positioning of water troughs so cows are waiting a long time to drink, reduced feed space, and the impact of bully cows can all have an effect.

Watch the cows interact, come in and out of parlours, walk along tracks and how they cope with their environment can tell you a great deal. Some of these factors can also influence mastitis rates.

Last but not least, (yes he's going on about TRANSITION cows again), cows losing excessive body condition and compromising their digital cushions are more prone to lameness and the microscopic changes occurring in the foot that will turn into ulcers, white line separation, so monitoring BCS in the dry cow period and adjusting management where necessary can have a significant effect on lameness prevention. So much comes back to this important stage of the cow's "year".

Changing the environment can in some cases be a relatively simple procedure, in other cases can be expensive but when putting up units, don't forget the cow.

Next time I will look briefly at treatment and footbaths, but PREVENTION is better than CURE, and in the long run, cheaper.

INVESTIGATING MASTITIS

Mastitis continues to be a problem in many herds, along with high bulk milk somatic cell counts, and sub-clinical mastitis. Over the summer of 2014, this has resulted in some milk cheques being affected as cell counts rise to penalty levels. There is also the effect that increased cell counts have on milk yield, causing further financial loss at a time when milk prices are falling.

The blunderbuss answer to these problems are to cull cows which are "millionaires" with their cell count figures, often high yielding cows in their prime. Obviously the disappearance of a cow contributing 15-20% of the bulk cell count will bring about an instantaneous improvement in overall cell count, but how long will it last before the figure starts to rise again? Added in is the cost in replacing her with a not so productive heifer, thus in the end the "girls" pick themselves for culling, rather than you being able to cull the cows you want to for poor production etc.

So, as in all farm situations, prevention is better than cure (or culling).

We can come up with off the cuff fire brigade solutions to herd mastitis problems, however for long term solutions a requirement for certain data is essential.

1. **Historical through to present day bulk somatic cell counts and bactoscan figures.** These should be supplied on a regular basis by your milk purchaser, but can be done on a weekly, daily basis if necessary, and especially fluctuating or continually high bactoscan figures can indicate possible hygiene problems.
2. **Individual cell counts are essential** for identifying cows with sub-clinical mastitis, some of which you may be unaware of, showing no sign of mastitis, but contributing significantly to overall cell count figures. These cows can then be quarter California Milk tested, to identify the affected quarter for treatment. This can prevent sub-clinical mastitis turning into the next millionaire. These figures will also give an indication of time of infection, whether dry cow or lactation infection. If a figure of over 200,000 suggests infection, then any new infection within the first thirty days of calving suggests dry cow

infection. An incidence greater than 1 case in 12 calving within 30 days is suggestive of a dry cow infection problem.

3. **Bacteriology** – is a great help. Knowing what bugs are causing your mastitis problem will give some indication of possible causes, e.g. E.coli is suggestive of an environmental problem, Staph. Aureus is a contagious mastitis problem. Other bugs can be associated with different types of bedding. Therefore knowing what we are dealing with is essential in terms of cause, treatment and realistic outcomes.

Sampling affected quarters before treatment allows us to do this. Samples can be frozen and stored over a period until say you have ten samples which can be sent off together, to give a good indication of disease trends, and the chief causal organism. N.b. some E.coli infections can be very transient, and on culture may come back sterile (no bacterial growth), as the body has already eliminated the infection.

PCR milk tests, looking for bits of DNA from the bacteria, will also give a broad view of the bacteria involved on any farm.

4. **Recording cases is essential.** Cow number, date, quarter affected, treatment and outcome. From this we can gauge treatment success, recurrence rates and need for more aggressive treatment.
5. **Teat scoring** – can also show teat damage, which may be machine induced thus may indicate possible mastitis causes.

This important information can be used as the basis of any mastitis investigation. The milking plant, environment, cow behaviour and milking routines can then be looked at to try and reduce the problem, short and long term. The Dairy Co Mastitis Plan uses this information as a basis to come up with solutions to herd problems. It can take time, but in the long run is more beneficial than relying on blitzing everything with tubes and culling. The long term benefits of mastitis control cannot be underestimated, both for the welfare of the cows, and the financial advantages in milk quality and increased production i.e. more litres sold.

Rod.

A BITTERSWEET GOODBYE



I don't know how to start this letter as I never liked to say goodbye but I'll give it a go.

It has been a wonderful time for me working at Mac&O first, SFV now, but I've reached a point where things have to move in another direction for me and I will start a new role at Harper Adams University from October.

The new job offer has

been very welcome but it is really sad to say goodbye to such a wonderful team and to such nice farmers. The working environment and the support from all the practice members could not have been better. You guys are the best!

I'll grab this opportunity to say thanks to you all for the warm welcome from minute one, for your patience with my Spanglish and for always trying to make my job easier and enjoyable as much as possible. Special thanks to those who made me feel like

I was at home, feeding me as one more in your family during those long TB testing days, thank you so much. I would like to go one by one to thank you but I'm afraid that Sam would need to print an annex to the newsletter then.

I will really miss driving around from farm to farm and the nice chats had while standing by the race but I think that I've already had enough TB testing...

Nevertheless, I will keep in contact with the practice for some epidemiological projects so you might see me around from time to time.

Thank you all very much. It has been a pleasure.

Raquel

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