



Increased demand and decreased distribution

The past few weeks has seen some truly unprecedented times. As the UK and global burden of COVID-19 continues to grow, increased demand for British dairy products, meat and eggs surges at the supermarket, and yet scenes of milk being poured away as processors fail to cope are becoming all too familiar. I hope I am not being too optimistic when I say I believe that there will be light at the end of the tunnel at this point. Each day is full of surprises – that is one certainty. Maybe the consumer, and those in government will remember to value of food security, and why it is imperative to support British farming – I hope that this is in the near future, and sees farm gate prices strengthen and that government listens to calls for aid to those farm businesses in crisis.

What steps can be taken now, where milk processors are demanding milk production is dropped? The vast majority of our dairy farmers are already exceptionally efficient, so in essence it will be a backwards step in reducing output over fixed costs. However, this can be done sympathetically, to reduce the impact and retain as much value on the farm as possible.

Keep feeding your cows:

It seems obvious to do this, and maybe counter-intuitive not to immediately reign back feeding. For fresh cows, it is important to keep feeding a well-balanced diet, and feed to yield. If cows are not supported to reach peak yield, you cannot reverse this later, and not only may you find it hard to generate more litres when prices improve, but stale cows will get fat leading



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to more metabolic challenge, milk fever, ketosis, endometritis and LDA and impaired fertility next lactation. Late lactation cows can be fed a reduced concentrate rate, or grazed, but again beware crashing yields and allowing cows to pile on body condition.

Cull Carefully:

Cull any low yielding cows out straight away, but be mindful 2 pitfalls – overshooting and ending up producing less milk than intended, and secondly – reducing stocking rates and seeing a lift in yield! We can double check your break-even point based on feed costs and milk yields if this is helpful. Barren prices fell sharply last week, so it may be worth while holding off or selling in the barrens.

Dry Cows off Early:

Drying your lowest yielding in calf cows off early is an effective way to reduce the maintenance cost of the herd. Far off dry cow rations, or poor grazing is much cheaper than milking cow ration, so the yield/cow in milk increases along with protecting margins.

Prioritise herd health and fertility:

Many of our herds can be proud of their excellent pre-rates, which maintain cow health and performance. These don't happen by accident, and with a 5% change in preg-rate being worth around £100/cow for the herd, it is important to maintain. Routine work is carrying on, with excellent attention to social distancing almost exclusively. Keep up with routine vaccinations, re-starting is usually more costly, and a disease outbreak is a big financial hit – conservative estimates value abortions at around £700/case. Maintain routine foot-trimming as trimming lame cows later will be far more costly.

Keep working with your nutritionist – they help maintain margins over feed when times are good, so are never more

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important than when the market is highly uncertain. As COVID-19 disrupts oil prices and the availability of some feeds, we will need to work together to fine tune rations with less conventional straights included, depending on how cows respond to changes.

Feeding whole milk to calves:

Whole milk is an excellent quality feed. However, it comes with several health warnings on farm. It must be from Johnes free cows, and must be from low cell count cows that are not on antibiotics. Collection, storage and feeding of whole milk must be scrupulously clean – ideally drawn from the line from designated cows at the start of milking, without going through the plate cooler for immediate feeding so that the temperature is the same each feed.

In summary;

- Keep feeding cows to get them to peak, only reducing feed rate in late lactation/stale cows – graze if possible.
- Discuss changes with one of the vets, to see if you can unearth any unexpected consequences before they arise
- Get us to help you monitor body condition in late lactation cows and in transition cows – we can help identify cows at risk of metabolic disease and agree mitigating action
- Discuss and implement blood sampling for metabolic screening in transition cows – this is especially important where long dry periods and unfamiliar concentrate feeds are being used
- Maintain essential vaccines, routine and preventative health measures
- Pick up the phone and discuss any worries or new ideas with one of our vets – we are here to help!

James



ADAS Farm Resilience Project



In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, most other news seems to have gone 'by the by', and you would be forgiven for having forgotten all about Brexit. However, the government has stressed that despite coronavirus, they are standing by their original Brexit timeline.

The 2020 Agriculture Bill, which came into force in January, gives the government the power to reshape the farming subsidy system following our full departure from the EU. Starting in 2021, the existing single farm payment system will begin to be phased out over a period of seven years. The details of how it will be replaced are still incomplete. However, it is widely expected that the level of subsidy will be much lower than under the current single farm payment scheme, and that participating in environmental land management schemes will form some of the basis for claiming payments.

In preparation for this upheaval in the subsidy system, ADAS are running pilot advisory schemes for grazing livestock farmers in two geographical regions, as part of the Defra Future Farming Resilience Fund. In Shropshire, we are fortunate enough to fall into one of the pilot areas (the other is Cumbria).

Their original plan was to hold a local meeting to discuss the imminent changes in agricultural funding, followed by a follow-up meeting on your farm to discuss your specific situation, and the individual needs of your business. As a result of Covid-19, the initial meeting is now going to take place in the form of a webinar, although it is hoped that the follow-up meetings on your farm will still take place on farm as originally planned.

This service is fully funded and comes at no cost to the farmer, although you will be asked to fill in an anonymised survey at the beginning and end of the process.

The webinars being broadcast in place of the initial group meetings are taking place on the following dates:

Wednesday 6th May: 7.00pm to 8.00pm

Thursday 14th May: 11.30am to 12.30pm

As mentioned, there is no cost in participating in the scheme, but places are limited and booking is essential. To take part, please contact ADAS at resilience@adas.co.uk, quoting your business' SBI number.

John



TB Update

In mid-March, APHA announced that Shropshire and Staffordshire were finally to go to six monthly TB testing from April. Just over two weeks later (and after we had sent out last months newsletter) this was retracted. We sent a lot of people a text to inform them of the change but please accept our apologies if this was misleading. Events, although a bit more settled this month, were moving very quickly in March.

For the record, Shropshire and Staffordshire are to remain with the current twelve month testing interval for the foreseeable future and all normal testing windows apply. This will of course have no relevance to you if you are currently unfortunate enough to be under restrictions.

As a company, Shropshire Farm Vets is still testing and will do so until instructed by government to stop. However, we do have to follow some new rules, just as everyone has to.

APHA (England and Wales) have said that TB testing should continue so long as it is safe to do so by following the new social distancing rules. This means that some adjustments will have to take place in order to maintain the social distance of at least 2 metres though this is as much for your protection as it is for the vets. This may mean stepping back from the crush every time to allow the vet to come forwards, but it will be whatever is right for your farm so that the test can continue. Some tests may run a little slower but that isn't a great price to pay to keep everything on track.

Youngstock that would normally be held/physically restrained for testing do pose a bit more of a challenge to maintain the 2m distance. Various options have been tried at different farms so try whatever works for you. Suggestions range from grouping calves into small tight groups and letting the vet test on their own, using calf crushes, using sheep races, extending gates and even haltering calves. There has been a lot of discussion with APHA in order to officially not test youngstock, but to no avail.

After discussion and/or if a means of maintaining 2m distance cannot be found, the vet has the authority to call off the test and

under these circumstances, a part-test will be called. If a safe means of testing cannot be found before the testing window closes, the herd will go under restrictions but APHA have said that there will be no referral to RPA for late test penalties.

Additionally, the office will ask about the health status of people on your farm, and the vet will also phone you, either on the way or the day before with early tests.

It is just as likely that you will want to know that our vets are doing everything they can to maintain distance themselves. They are, and all our vets will have been working remotely for seven weeks (by the time you read this in early May) but please ask them yourself.

Finally, if you are "shielding" yourself or any other member of your family, you have every right to not test. You will go over your window and have restrictions applied as above, but we have been assured there will be no referral to RPA.

In March we tested just 7406 head over 59 tests. There were 17 reactors and 4 inconclusives.

Alistair



Lamb Nematodirus Update

While much of the grazing has been very dry for the last few weeks, it is important to remember that the hatching of nematodirus worms is *temperature dependent*, and that owing to our recent warm spell, Shropshire is currently classified as being at **very high risk** of nematodirus outbreaks by the SCOPS parasite forecast.

Symptoms of nematodirus infection in lambs are the rapid onset of profuse dark scouring and wasting of condition, followed by death in as little as a few days. Typically, lambs affected are 6-12 weeks old.

The risk of losing out to this parasite can be easily curtailed by strategic grazing management. Speak to your vet about what measures you could take to reduce the risk in your flock.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning that we can still carry out faecal egg count tests, although during the lockdown period samples will be sent for testing at the external lab, rather than being carried out in-house. As such, results are likely to take 24-48 hours rather than the same-day service which we usually offer.

John



Meds Corner

I am delighted to say that the delivery service remains popular, even increasingly so. Chloe, and occasionally Mihail, are doing somewhere between 15 and 20 deliveries a day, every day. Our own deliveries have proved a little challenging, as have the various stock outages over the last few months. I cannot remember a time when we have had so many products fall away or been unavailable, so please bear with us if we do not have your preferred product in-stock. We are working hard to get some more or find an alternate.

Tetra Delta – some good news for a change! By the time you read this we fully expect to have a Tetra Delta Milking Cow **replacement** in stock. It is a very near equivalent imported from Spain called **Gamaret**. Use is the same as TDMC and Gamaret has withdrawals of 72 hours for milk and 7 days for meat. There is still no reliable timeframe for the return of TDMC (it was supposed to be January!).

UbroPen is with us now. This is a penicillin tube and probably has most use against Strep uberis.

As with all decisions on tubes and/or policy and protocols, make sure you speak to your vet as to the best options available at the time. We have little reliable word on the other milking cow tube outages and have been hand to mouth on most products recently. We will update you as and when.



Foston – this product has had what sounds like a permanent recall by the VMD as it “no longer meets the current EU regulations for food-producing species”. From today, 17th April, Foston has been recalled from wholesalers but NOT at practice or farm level. This means that if you have it on your shelf you can still legitimately use it, as we will, until we get a replacement in-stock. This replacement is called **Vigophos** and is a combination phosphorus plus B12 product. This was a change we were debating about making anyway as there are some potential benefits from the phosphorus/B12 combination that outweigh Foston, but the recall by VMD has made this decision anyway.

Alistair

ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTERS

From the middle of 2020, we will only be producing electronic newsletters for delivery by email, or download from the website. In order to keep receiving the newsletters, please make sure that we have your email address/addresses that are appropriate.

We will be giving monthly reminders so at the moment there is plenty of time to organise this.

EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS

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SEAN HUGHES	07973 567367	CALIN BOGDAN	07425 314090

Please keep a note of the mobile numbers for the vets should you ever need them

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