FarmVets SOUTHWEST

FarmNews

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June 2023 Newsletter

Controlling BVD in your beef herd

There is now a real drive throughout the UK for nationwide eradication of Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD).

The ultimate objective of BVD-free status for the country may be some way off, but eradication of this damaging infectious disease within the confines of your own beef farm should be an achievable aim relatively quickly. The benefits for herds where the disease is present should be dramatic, with improved performance and reduced economic losses, whilst for those currently clear the incentives to remain so are equally significant.

BVD can be one of the biggest drains on beef herd profitability, with one diagnostic survey indicating the disease is present on nearly two-thirds of beef units, at a cost of around £46.50/cow/year[1]. Mucosal disease is one obvious clinical sign of infection, where persistently infected (PI) cattle experience a mutation in the virus that causes them to suddenly bleed from all orifices and die, but this is often just the tip of the iceberg.

The virus is more likely to result in reduced fertility through high levels of abortion and returns to service in the adult herd. Exposure also commonly causes immune suppression leading to increased levels of pneumonia, scours and depressed growth rates in calves.

Effective biosecurity is a must as the virus can spread very easily via nose-to-nose contact. The disease also moves from dam to her unborn calf, causing additional serious complications.

When a naive cow is exposed to the virus during the first 120 days of pregnancy, the calf may be born carrying and shedding the virus and is termed ‘Persistently Infected’ – a PI. These PIs are highly infectious and present one of the greatest risks of disease spread, though they may not themselves show any significant signs of illness. This is particularly important to bear in mind when buying in-calf cows as the mother may not pose a risk but the calf could.

Identifying PIs and culling them is the first step in any situation, followed by measures to prevent the disease entering the herd. Given the difficulty of maintaining biosecurity that is 100% effective, on-going vaccination against BVD is essential for many UK herds. Carried out correctly, vaccination will help protect cows from the effects of exposure to the BVD virus and significantly reduce the risk of a PI being produced. Due to the ease with which BVD is spread, vaccination is recommended for all beef breeding herds.

New testing methods are now available to make it easier to identify PIs, whether buying in stock or to check the status of your own breeding animals. Alongside good biosecurity protocols and the correct vaccination procedures, we can help you ensure your herd is BVD-free.

The control of this disease links neatly in with the Animal Health and Welfare pathway, which is part of the Sustainable Farming Incentive Scheme recently introduced by the government. Signing up to this scheme will pay for the initial BVD testing in your herd, as well as two hours of vet time, which can be spent on coming up with a rigid BVD control and eradication plan tailored to your farm if it is found to be required.

Plan ahead to prevent Toxoplasmosis

It has been estimated that over 90% of sheep flocks in Great Britain have been exposed to *Toxoplasma gondii*. If you are not already vaccinating against toxoplasmosis it's probably only a matter of time before new ewes are exposed to an infection, so you should plan ahead accordingly.

If you have had more than 3% of your flock abort during the lambing season, an investigation would be worthwhile. Now is the time to work out what caused this year's problems with a view to avoiding it reoccurring next year. Your primary focus should be on preventing infection in pregnant ewes in the first place, and the best way to do that is to vaccinate replacement ewes well before they go to the ram.

The complex *Toxoplasma gondii* parasite lifecycle presents significant disease management challenges. The sheer volume of infectious eggs produced by the parasite and their resistance to destruction leads to widespread environmental contamination: this is one of the main reasons why toxoplasmosis is so prevalent in GB flocks. Sheep are very vulnerable to picking up the *Toxoplasma* parasite from the environment, so normal biosecurity measures are not enough to control the disease. Fortunately, toxoplasmosis can be controlled effectively by a simple vaccination regime.

An investment in vaccination should payback handsomely by a reduction in future flock barren and abortion rates. The clear industry advice now is that every ewe should have been vaccinated before it breeds. After two years, a single repeat dose can be given at least 3 weeks prior to mating. However, most ewes are only vaccinated once during a breeding lifetime as natural boosting occurs, so one dose may be all that is required.

All current and potential replacement ewes should be vaccinated any time between four months and three weeks before tupping. Immediately post lambing and up until the typical autumn breeding season there's a very wide window of opportunity to vaccinate most female breeding sheep against toxoplasmosis, so it makes sense to schedule this crucial intervention as soon as possible.

If you experienced a few abortions or weakly lambs during the lambing season, please contact us on 01278 663399 for advice and we can investigate.

Available products

← We currently have an excess of flutter valves, so we will be selling these for only £7 + VAT. It will be first come, first served!

Protectors for 250ml Metacam bottles are now also available free of charge, first come first served! →

Cool bags

If you have taken one of our cool bags to transport vaccines home from the practice please can you return them at your earliest convenience. Thank you.

Meeting on Calf Health and Rearing

Wednesday the 7th of June at Collum Farm, Kewstoke.

We will be holding talks on calf health, colostrum management and johnes control, and demonstrating the work our Vet Techs are carrying out regarding disbudding and growth rate monitoring. Please call the office to book on if you are interested in attending.