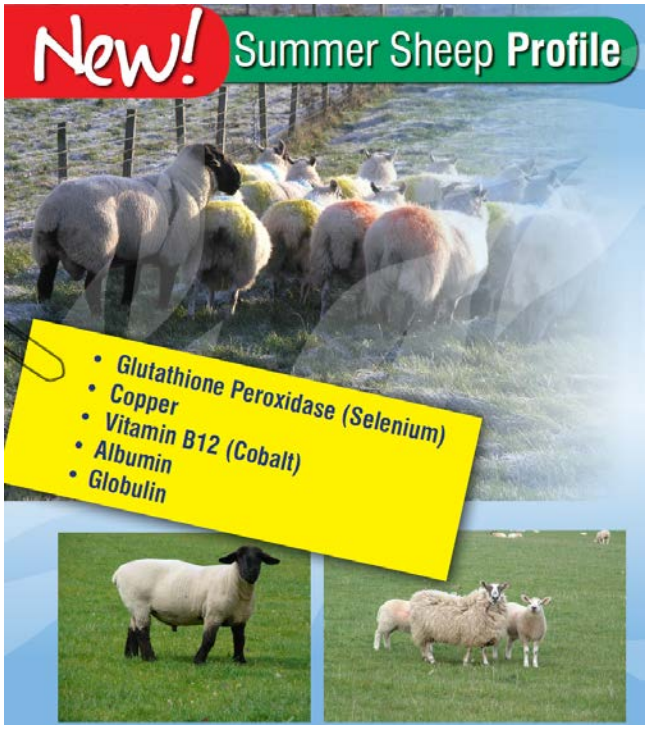
DAIRY HERD HEALTH & PRODUCTIVITY SERVICE

Newsletter 2014, Q3 August 2014



Summer Sheep profile

For ewes, rams and post-weaning lambs, blood sampling for trace elements and disease status can be invaluable in late summer.

The focus at this time of year is on **groups of ewes and rams** to assess whether they are in optimum condition for mating.

For lambs it is of benefit to ensure trace element or disease problems are not affecting growth rates.

What will be analysed:

Glutathione Peroxidase (Selenium)

Low selenium levels around mating time result in increased early embryonic mortality and so reduced ewe productivity. Low selenium levels in growing lambs often manifest as poor growth rates and wool production. Low selenium levels may also lead to "white muscle disease" in lambs – newborn lambs are weak, tire easily, appear stiff and with rapid respiratory rate. Older lambs may appear lame. In some cases, lambs may die suddenly from heart failure.

Copper

Low copper results in poor wool growth in all ages of sheep and may be accompanied by poor growth rates, anaemia and fragile bones in growing lambs. Low copper levels may also lead to reduced immune system function.

Vitamin B12 (cobalt)

Vitamin B12 is produced in the rumen from dietary cobalt, and is required by the enzymes which regulate energy metabolism. Cobalt deficiency is usually first seen in growing lambs as poor growth rates, reduced wool quality and a watery discharge from the eyes.

More severe deficiency results in anorexia, anaemia and "Ovine White Liver Disease" where the reduced capacity of the liver enzymes handling fat breakdown results in the accumulation of fat in the liver. Cobalt deficiency in ewes is implicated in increased stillbirths and neonatal mortality.

Albumin and Globulin

Albumin and globulin levels reflect disease problems such as liver fluke, gutworms and Johnes disease. Such disease issues may affect growth rates in lambs, as well as barren rates and low scanning percentages in ewes after mating.

Samples to submit and cost:

Two lithium heparin (green) vacutainers are required from each sheep. A minimum of ten ewes per test is required, with at least five animals sampled from each group. For each summer sheep profile test comprising 10 animals, the current cost is £225. Please do not hesitate to contact the DHHPS office with any queries.

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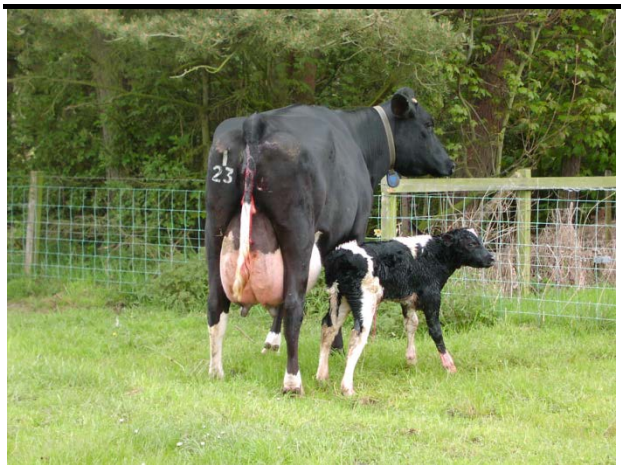

Calving cows at grass this autumn?

For those traditional autumn-block calving herds in the UK (yes – many still exist!) or even year-round calving herds, calving cows out at grass in the summer often seems the most practical option. Less infectious agents around can mean less calf scour, and separate calving paddocks for Johnes positive cows can help reduce infection of calves. However there are some issues worth bearing in mind when calving cows at grass:

Milk fevers. The usual cause of milk fevers is the mineral content of the "close up" transition dry cow diet in the last 2 weeks of pregnancy – either a high calcium content and/or a high DCAB (usually due to high levels of potassium/potash). Unfortunately grazed grass is usually high in both calcium and potassium, and so is generally not good news for milk fever control. Options include

- Reduce intakes of grazed grass by restricting the grazing available to the cows.
- Provide an alternative forage for the cows to maintain DM intakes precalving – maize silage, wholecrop and chopped straw are better for milk fever due to their lower mineral content. Even some grass silage may help.
- Supplement with magnesium – either via dry cow rolls, or in the drinking water.
- If you only have small numbers of cows calving, using calcium by mouth at the point of calving (boluses, drenches or gels) helps give the cow calcium when she needs it.
- In future, do not apply slurry or potash fertilizers to calving paddocks to reduce levels of potassium in the grazed grass.

Transition cow health. Retained cleansing, metritis, ketosis and LDAs can be a problem during the autumn. Some of these issues may be secondary to milk fevers, but underlying issues with fatty liver often complicate the picture due to impaired immune system function.

- Maintain Dry Matter intakes precalving by ensuring that there is fresh, palatable ration in front of the transition dry cows at all times. Not easy in either the heat or the rain……
- Clean out the feed troughs, and move them on a regular basis. Feed is more likely to spoil in the hot weather and direct sunlight.
- Ensure access to lots of clean drinking water
- Make sure "far off" dry cows do not get too fat at grass. Aim to calve at BCS 2.5 – 3.0
- If feeding more than 1 kg straw in the "close up" period, also need to feed straw in the "far off" period to get cows used to it precalving.

Mastitis in freshly calved cows. If you are having problems with cows getting mastitis in the first month of lactation (more than 1 in 12 calving cows) and/or high cell counts at the first milk recording (more than 10%), it is likely that there are environmental infections getting into the udder during the dry period. Whilst we tend to associate such infections with indoor calving management, outdoor calving cows can have similar (if not worse) conditions. The vagaries of the UK "summer" weather do not help…….

- Use internal teat sealants at drying off, although they will not work in the face of overwhelming environmental contamination!
- Consider using external teat sealants in heifers
- Keep areas around feed and water troughs as clean as practical. Move feed troughs regularly to reduce poaching, and stop cows lying in warm spoiled waste food.
- Any pasture grazed by dry cows should be used for a maximum of 2 weeks, followed by at least 4 weeks rest to reduce bacteria levels.

Although calving cows at grass may seem the most practical option, it is not without its problems. If you are not sure, why not blood test the cows to "ask them what they think of their diet" before problems arise?

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