

Newsletter

May 2019

Following the challenging start to the year, hopefully the sunshine is here to stay for a little while, at least until the crops need some rain! This month Mike and Paul look back on the sheep client meeting in the spring, Fraser talks about synchronisation protocols for beef cows, and Andy looks at plasma collection in alpacas.

Project LAMB



Shortly after our last newsletter, Mike and Paul hosted a client meeting along with Bridget Girvan of MSD as part of 'Project LAMB' (Loss Avoidance for Maximum Benefit). The focus of this meeting was on common diseases at lambing time and trying to minimise losses. We hope the meeting was useful and that lambing time has been well for all our clients. However, we all know that things don't always go according to plan, and we are keen to work together to improve the use of on-farm data, with the aim of maximising health and profitability. MSD kindly provided attendees with wall charts to try to simplify on-farm data recording at this busy time - if you could send any photos of these charts to m.j.evans-5@sms.ed.ac.uk (or any other data collected so far this year). We are keen to use these to help with anonymous local benchmarking at future meetings, and to target individual flock health plans towards areas where intervention will have maximum impact.

Ewe Mastitis

Treatment options for ewe mastitis were also discussed at the flock health meeting in February. There is some limited evidence of antimicrobial resistance amongst the bacteria that can cause mastitis in ewes; but there is relatively little information about the extent of this. We therefore launched a small pilot study, to collect milk samples and test these for evidence of resistance. Thank you to those who have submitted your samples already. If any further samples could be passed on to the practice, we will hopefully be able to submit them to the laboratory for processing.

Beef fertility

Many of our spring calving herds are well through calving now, and already we are looking to the future getting ready for the next bulling period. Bull testing is now part of the annual routine on many of your farms.

However, we also have an increasing number of beef suckler clients using Artificial Insemination as part of their breeding strategy. Synchronisation and artificial insemination offers the opportunity to buy new and more varied genetics into your herd. This can be useful for those herds that breed their own replacements. It can also cut down the number of breeding bulls you need in a herd so reducing the year round maintenance and uncertainty associated with bulls.

Traditionally suckler herds have been put off by the number of handlings that were part of traditional synchronisation protocols. With cows and calves out at pasture, it can feel like a big commitment to be handling all cows at this time of year. In recent years there has been a lot of development in protocols for beef cows and heifers, especially following extensive trials in Ireland by AFBI. There are now a number of different options, including a programme that involves just three handlings.

If you are thinking about integrating synchronisation and Artificial Insemination into your herd, or if you are just interested to find out more, please get in contact with the practice. We can discuss your breeding aims, devise programmes to suit the circumstances on your farm, and help assess and adjust your breeding plan using your calving and scanning results.

Alpaca plasma collection at the Dick Vet

It is well known that ingestion of sufficient colostrum in the first few hours of life is essential for the passive transfer of immunity to newborn calves and lambs, via the absorption of maternal antibodies in colostrum.

For calves and lambs, we often stomach tube animals with their own mothers' or banked colostrum in the first few hours of life. However stripping colostrum from an alpaca is extremely challenging! Instead cria (baby alpacas) known or suspected not to have suckled their dams are administered a transfusion of plasma by a vet. Plasma is produced by separating blood by centrifugation to remove the cells but leave the proteins, which includes the antibodies. Blood donors are normally vaccinated castrated males from the same holding. Plasma is prepared prior to the anticipated period of need, and then stored at home by owners, ready for use. The Dick Vet is proud to be the only practice in Scotland currently offering an alpaca plasma collection and processing service.



Andy Hopker and Emily Gorman collecting blood from an alpaca for processing to plasma

New gates for Easter Bush campus access

For any of you who have popped into the practice recently, you will have noticed the shiny new electronic gates that have been installed. This is now the only way into and out of the Farm Animal Practice car park, as the other roadway is now gated and not for use. The electronic gates open inwards, so as you approach them they will open automatically. When you leave, please stop your vehicle at the stop signs to ensure the gates don't open into your car!

If you have any problems with the gates, please do let us know.

