



Another spring lambing and calving season has come and gone, the Royal Highland Show is peeping around the corner and we're again anxiously waiting for the temperatures in the East of Scotland to rise. Some things never change! Not only were many lambs and calves delivered successfully in the past months, our DHHPS vet Julie Forrest also gave birth to a gorgeous baby girl. And whilst Julie and Morven are enjoying some quality time together, we've been busy recruiting for her replacement who will take post in June and is introduced here. Also in this newsletter James discusses flock health planning during the summer months, Martin looks at the benefits of once-bred heifer systems and Andy fills you in on some of his recent work in India.

## Jenny Heap joins the Farm Animal team

Following graduation from the Royal Veterinary College, London, Jenny moved to North Victoria in Australia to work in a mixed practice with a strong dairy emphasis. She enjoyed her time and travels there and gained great respect for the drought stricken, resourceful dairy farmers and a love for treating their cows. Returning to the UK she traded the heat, flies and flat dairying country for locum work amongst sheep, hills, and the biting winds of the Outer Hebrides and Wales. She enjoyed a couple of busy lambing seasons here but alas her tan had long since disappeared, so last year she returned to work in dairy practice in Australia once again.

She likes working in first opinion practice, meeting new clients and building working relationships, but also wants to expand the academic and student education aspects of her career and thus is very excited to fill Julie's maternity position in the Dairy Herd Health and Productivity Service and Farm Animal Practice. She's looking forward to the chal-

lenges of joining the Edinburgh vet team and meeting and working with you all, as well as tackling some of the famous Scottish Munros in her downtime.



## Flock Health Planning—The Summer Months

Flock health planning involves identifying the risks and problems affecting a flock and tackling these in a targeted way. Sometimes further investigation and testing will be required to identify the problems, other times advice may be given based on existing knowledge of the farm; always it involves an on-going discussion between vet and farmer. With lambing out of the way and tupping time still many months away, this period of the year is the prime time to address many of these issues.

**Anthelmintic resistance:** do you know that the wormers you use are effective or are you gambling? Lost growth rates occur long before more obvious signs like continued scouring, when ineffective wormers are used; each use of a wormer to which resistance exists further worsens the situation. Performing a faecal egg count reduction test in lambs (usually post-weaning) can inform on the efficacy of different classes of wormers.

**Making use of the "crock flock":** do you have cull ewes which are too thin for the ring or the abattoir? Don't worry, they can still be useful! Examining a group of these ewes can be very informative as to which chronic diseases, e.g. Johne's, OPA, CLA, MV, may be present on farm. If donated as teaching cases to the Farm Animal Hospital, there will be no charge for the initial examination nor for post-mortem examination and disposal if the problem is insoluble.

Other aspects of flock health planning which are best tackled between June and October include developing a quarantine protocol (and a buying protocol) prior to purchasing tups and female replacements, a lameness plan (as it is easiest to tackle lameness once the fat lambs have been sold), tup breeding soundness examinations as well as investigating any problems which arise e.g. poor lamb growth rates. For further advice, please contact the Farm Animal Practice.

## Once-Bred Heifers

With milk quotas lifted, the purse strings surrounding CAP and single farm payments tightening and market prices looking like a ride at Blackpool Pleasure Beach, sleepless nights are certainly understandable. Production efficiency to make ends meet is a priority for all. As the majority of our beef and dairy clients are already enjoying the rewards of calving down heifers at 2 years of age, it's maybe appropriate to contemplate the benefits of Once-Bred Heifer (OBH) systems too.

The basic principle behind the OBH is to mate a heifer at 15 months, to calve at 24 months, wean the calf early and finish the heifer for slaughter rapidly after calving (6 weeks at the earliest). Breeding the OBH is an effective way of boosting calf availability and generating more output from the same land.

The OBH system can have various end points, the calf from a OBH can be weaned a couple of days after birth, two-three weeks after calving or six months later and the heifer either finished at grass or intensively. The key is to set out a plan that best suits your system and stick to it.

The eating quality of OBH is the same as that of unbred heifers of the same age, however killing-out percentage may fall by 2–3% due to udder development and uterine weight. Appropriate bull selection and good heifer nutrition are vital in ensuring the system works, and of course attention to detail will lead to greater success.

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## Andy in India

Do you know which country in the world has the most cattle? America? Brazil perhaps? The answer is India. With over 280 million cattle, one quarter of the world population of cattle lives there.

What are they all doing there? Dairy production is very important with 45 million dairy cows, however many of these cows are producing only one to two litres a day for household use. This may sound inconsequential, however in rural communities this provides essential protein for children and is achieved without providing any supplemental feeding to the cow. Large scale dairying using Holstein genetics is becoming more common, however these animals survive very poorly in jungle conditions on traditional family farms.

So what do all these other cattle do? Bullock power is still the main source of agricultural power in India. Cattle are essential for ploughing fields, threshing crops and pulling carts, often working in pairs. Raising, training and trading working bullocks is big business, with a single animal having the same value as several months turnover for a small family farm.

Cattle health is essential for the prosperity of rural families and the untimely death of a single adult beast can be a major blow for a family, while even small increases in animal health and productivity can produce tangible benefits. To assist this, the R(D)SVS is running an Indian Veterinary Education Programme headed by Professor Neil Sargison. One of several current projects is a farmer education programme in the reserve and tribal areas of Madhyr Pradesh, using a discussion group model to engage with farmers who

are often considered difficult to reach due to low levels of education and illiteracy. Common topics covered include diarrhoea, tick disease, pneumonia and maggot wounds.

In a country where there is no official beef trade (in some states killing a cow can result in a long jail sentence) what happens to all the cows? Dying of old age is not uncommon, run down by traffic can be a problem and some still get eaten by a tiger!

