

Newsletter

May 2020

Certainly very strange times we find ourselves in currently. We hope that you and your families are keeping well in these uncertain times. This month we're giving you an update on the impacts of Covid-19 on our work and reminders about the importance of colostrum in both cattle and sheep

Coronavirus and the Farm Animal Practice

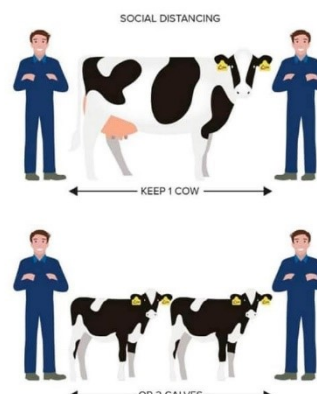
You will be well aware of the government's social isolation guidelines in this current pandemic, and it has meant we have had to change the way we operate. It isn't "business as usual" for the farm animal practice and probably won't be for some time to come. Here are some of the ways things we have changed to minimise the risk of spreading the coronavirus:

- We no longer have any students present on the campus or attending calls.
- Most vets are working directly from home and the cars and equipment are shared less between the team and disinfected between vets.
- We are operating a "no-contact" drug order policy: please continue to ring in advance to place your order, which will be put in the "drug pick up zone" in the porch.
- Ali is doing a marvellous job continuing to work from the practice, but there may be times when the phone has to be put through to the answer machine and you will be told to ring the "after-hours number". A vet will ring you back as soon as possible. If it is during normal working hours (8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri) you will not be charged an after-hours fee.
- We can only attend calls if they are deemed to be "essential" on the basis of animal welfare or for the ongoing support of the food chain. This is assessed on a case by case and farm by farm basis, some cases might be dealt with by a phone consultation and others can be put off until a later date.
- A vet might ask you to bring the animal into the clinic to be examined, for example a lamb, they might then examine this animal away from you in order to minimise contact.

When a vet comes to the farm what can you do to help

- Please let us know if anyone on the farm is experiencing symptoms prior to our visit.
- Only have essential staff members present at a vet's visit and ask "high risk individuals" to stay away.
- Try to divide jobs up to avoid being within 2 metres of the vet, for example have a plan to stand on opposite sides of the race/crush and stick to these sides as much as possible.
- In situations where it is physically impossible to stay 2 metres away, for example during a cow Caesarean, allocate one person, who is preferably in a "low risk category" to assist the vet and only bring others into the 2 metre space if absolutely necessary. Avoid "swapping out jobs" half way through.
- Try to plan ahead how a job might be done safely, whilst still maintaining social distance from the vet.
- Please don't offer the vets anything to eat or drink and don't invite them into your home.
- Continue to follow the government guidelines of washing your hands regularly.

We may have to maintain social distancing for some time to come, please continue to contact us. We are still open, just working a little differently. We do, however, need your assistance and understanding to help us all operate in a safer manner during these uncertain times.



Colostrum is gold: recent research on lamb growth at the Dick Vet.

It is clear that farm animals have to make the best start in life, if they are to go on to be healthy and productive. When it comes to cattle and sheep, we all know that nothing is more important than receiving plentiful, high quality colostrum in the first hours of life, and that problems can lead to Failure of Passive Transfer (FPT). However, despite good awareness of this, neonatal diseases (navel ill, joint ill, watery mouth etc.) remain common, and a recent national survey funded by AHDB suggests that 74% of flocks still give insufficient colostrum to lambs that need assistance (less than 200ml for a lamb). Alex, Amy and Rob have been involved in collecting and analysing the data for that survey, in addition to studying the risk factors and long term effects associated with FPT in the University's Easter Bush flock. Early results from this study suggest that ewe nutrition has an important effect on the levels of antibodies in a lamb's blood. Lambs are likely to suffer from FPT if they are born to ewes that are energy deficient 2-4 weeks prior lambing and with multiple lambs. These lambs are also more likely to have reduced Daily Live Weight Gains (DLWG) going forward. In lambs with and without FPT, use of oral antibiotic treatment at birth did not improve DLWG. These results highlight the importance of making sure lambs from multiparous and sick ewes suckle within 4-6 hours of birth. Marking time is an excellent opportunity to take stock of how many lambs are on the ground and to set up weigh scales to start recording weights. This means that DLWG can be monitored through the grazing season and specific problems associated with poor DLWG can be quickly identified and treated to minimise impact. Average DLWGs can then also serve as benchmarks to compare performance next year and judge the impact of any changes in husbandry or veterinary treatments. Please get in touch if you'd like to chat about how we can use farm data to monitor and improve productivity on your farm. Further results from our work will be published by AHDB from autumn 2020.

Minimising calf losses

- Need to wean over 90% calves born to break even
- Small changes in management can have big effects on giving calves the best chance
- Record problems to learn from them next season
 - Is there a specific age that losses are occurring at?
 - How are the calves managed at that age?
 - Record deaths/problems as you go along. It's a busy time of the year and things are easily forgotten after you've moved onto the next job.
- Plan ahead to make your life easier
 - Having a store of frozen colostrum means there is something to reach for easily after that 2am Caesarean section....
 - Freeze colostrum in zip-lock bags not milk bottles for ease of defrosting
 - Nothing beats dam colostrum for antibodies
 - Feed artificial colostrum if that's the only thing available, but best to plan ahead and have some frozen from a quiet cow when you can
- Failure to get enough colostrum is common in beef calves
 - 1 in 3 suckler calves don't get enough antibody protection
 - Not getting enough colostrum can have major effects on disease, death rates and LWG
 - Assistance at calving is a major risk factor: male calves, calves born to heifers, calves born to thin cows, and twins are all more likely to require assistance

Feel free to give us a call at the practice (0131 445 4468) if you want to discuss anything on a more tailored level to your farm.

