

Newsletter

May 2024

As the drier and marginally warmer weather has finally come it's nice to see the stock and tractors out in the fields. This month Fergus discusses preparing bulls for the upcoming spring breeding season, Tony highlights the ever present parasite risk in sheep. Lastly we wanted to highlight the latest information we have regarding vaccine availability.

Ensuring Your Bull is Ready for Breeding Season

While the current calving season has demanded most of our attention, it is important not to overlook the health of your bulls before the breeding season. Bulls have a disproportionate effect on your herd's fertility compared to any other individual animal. However, like combine harvesters, bulls are often kept in a shed, only brought out for a few months, and seem to break down when needed most. Given that sperm production requires 2 months, we must be proactive and address any issues well in advance of the breeding season.

Lameness: Lameness is a leading issue for bulls as it directly affects the bull's ability to serve and reduces sperm production due to decreased testosterone. Mildly lame bulls can be hard to spot when in small pens, but they quickly flare up when turned out. If possible, bulls should be given space to exercise and build fitness before breeding. Check for overgrown feet may also need trimming.

Up to date vaccination: It can be easy to overlook vaccinating bulls. Any infectious disease contracted by the bull can severely hamper fertility, and their close contact with the cows during serving makes them a prime candidate for spreading diseases. If bulls are receiving a live vaccine, it is best to administer them well before the start of breeding, as some vaccines can cause a mild spike in body temperature.

Body condition score: A Bull can lose a significant amount of condition over the breeding season, so important to hit preseason targets BCS of 3-3.5. If a bull is too fat or too thin changing body condition takes time with sudden changes in diet being detrimental. So, start early and if in groups, make sure they have ample feed space

Bull Soundness Exam (BSE). BSEs are a great tool for detecting sub-fertile bulls. While it is most important to do virgin Bulls, it is not uncommon for proven bulls to pick up an issue between breeding seasons. **Grant money from the Scottish government can be used towards your bull BSE.**

New bulls: Make sure to buy bulls early. It can take time for the bull to settle into its unfamiliar environment, as the stress of movement can affect fertility. A lot of bulls are reared indoors on rations with a very high proportion of concentrates. the bull may experience a severe diet change. Speak to the seller about the bull's diet so you can transition them effectively. While most adult stock should not be susceptible to worms, new bulls reared indoors may not have had much exposure to parasites, so beware of the bull becoming loose or losing condition post-turnout. Bulls are often one of the only animals a farm buys so they can be a potential disease risk. Again, allowing ample time before start of mating allows you to quarantine and test your new bull before introduction to the cows for diseases such as BVD, Leptospirosis, IBR, and Johnes. Quarantine also allows you to spot diseases like digital dermatitis that cannot be tested for on bloods.



Worm Egg Counts - WECs

As temperatures finally start to rise, we will soon start seeing parasite burdens rising. Stay ahead of them with regular WECs. Lambs and calves should be monitored from 3 weeks after turnout, and repeat 3 weekly. We can do some samples in-house and will get results to you as quickly as we can.

In-house we can check for intestinal worms, lungworm and coccidiosis. Later in the season when we also check for fluke – we send these samples to an external lab to improve the accuracy of the testing.

The current Nematodirus risk is moderate to high as temperatures increase. Hatching is predicted for the first 2 weeks in May if the weather stays as it is. Disease will occur before eggs can be identified on WECs. Please monitor your lambs!

When collecting faeces for WECs – we need fresh samples from 10 animals to make the test representative of the group. Collect into a container – use a teaspoon! – and keep the container cool until you can drop it off.



Vaccine Supply

Please plan vaccine programs and order well in advance.

Sheep

Currently **Scabiguard** is available.

There are some sizes of **Heptavac-P** and **Ovivac-P** available, but these will run short.

At present there are no reported issues with **Enzovac** or **Toxovac**, however we would advise placing orders as soon as you can in case this changes.

Cattle

Leptovoid-H and **Spriovac** are in short supply.

BVD vaccines are available.

IBR (inactivated) is on limited supply from both manufacturers.

If you have any concerns regarding what vaccines to use please speak to one of the vets at the practice.