The Farm Vets
Hampden Veterinary Hospital

Practice Newsletter

Summer 2025

Practice News

A rather dry start to the year but we've had some rain now, hopefully we can have a bit more to catch up and get everything growing again! We've had a busy start to summer with our vets being part of both Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire Young Farmers Clubs which have held their rallies. Sally has been rather successful with her entries at Silsoe including 1 first for her cake and flower arrangement, then a second and third in other craft classes!

Vets Sophie and Jess went to watch some of our clients at Hertfordshire county show also, great day to be handing out new merchandise! Caps and woolly hats, socks and cool bags, we're covered for all weather!

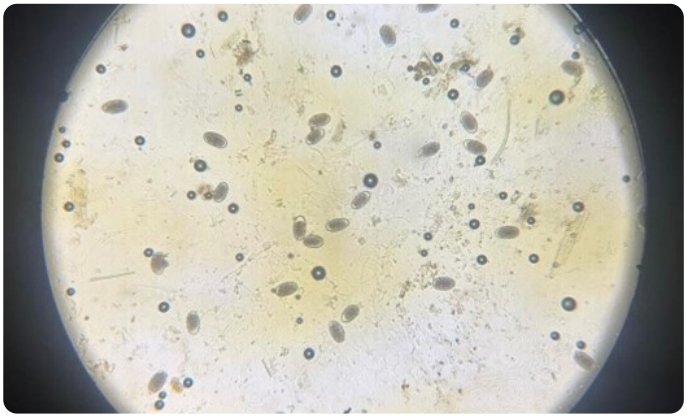
Keep an eye out for our Flockmasters and Beef Club meetings. Our Flockmasters club will be talking about post mortems, why do them, what to look for and what they can tell you, to be held at Sparrow Hall Farm on Tuesday 24th June, contact the office for more details.

Parasite Forecast

With the warm weather we are seeing an increase in parasite activity. The Nematodirus forecast is live and showing we are in a VERY HIGH-RISK area at the moment, you can check the forecast at https://www.scops.org.uk/forecasts/nematodirus-forecast/

Nematodirus in lambs is a serious parasitic disease that affects young lambs, particularly in spring, causing diarrhoea, dehydration, and weight loss, with the potential for high mortality if left untreated. Lambs are at higher risk if they graze pasture that carried lambs the previous spring and are old enough to eat significant amounts of grass (most commonly affected around 6-12 weeks of age). Lois has been busy performing faecal egg counts using our Micron machine. One faecal sample from an adult ewe was the largest strongle count we've had for a while, 286,000epg!! This is an extremely high count and the parasite contributing to a count this high would be Haemonchus Contortus.

Regular faecal egg counts and FAMACHA scoring are useful tools to monitor parasite burdens and indicate when treatments might be necessary. We've had reports of flystrike cases in both sheep and alpacas. Flystrike is a condition where blowflies lay eggs on soiled wool (/fibre) or wounds, and this leads to maggots feeding on the living tissue, causing illness and potentially death. It's important to know the signs to look out for and what preventative measures you can put in place to reduce the risk of flystrike in your animals. For more information or if you've got a small flock and would like Lois, our technician, to assist you with preventing flystrike then please call the office on 01296745376



In this edition...

vetPartners

Lameness research reiterates why early pain management leads to health and productivity gains

Lameness affects around a third of the national dairy herd, causing considerable economic losses through its impact on fertility and milk yield, as well as early culling and treatment costs. Yet, despite its impact, little overall progress has been made in reducing its prevalence over the past 20 years.

Although non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are being used more widely in lameness treatment, they are still underused for this painful condition.

As such, VetPartners funded Project FEET to investigate the perception of pain and use of NSAIDs for conditions caused or associated with lameness in dairy cows, by different members of a farm's mobility team.

From past research and clinical experience, we already know there is an increase in successful lameness recovery when mild cases of lameness are detected early and treated straight away with NSAIDs. Even more effective is when the NSAID is given in combination with a foot block and corrective trimming, which more than halves the number of cows that fail to recover. However, this only works in mild or early cases, so early detection and treatment is key.

Led by VetPartners vets, the Project FEET study researched the whole farm mobility team: farmers, farm vets, vet techs (VT) and foot trimmers (FT). A total of 210 participants were surveyed, including 80 farmers, 80 vets, 34 FTs and 15 VTs.

The findings showed that members of the mobility team had different perceptions around pain and lameness and that increasing collaboration and harnessing skills and knowledge within the team could improve early detection and treatment of lameness, with consequent benefits to cow welfare and production.

Farmer perception of lameness was also clearly different to other stakeholders in the mobility team. Farmers consistently scored pain lower than vets and foot trimmers and reported under 10% of their herd were lame at the time of the survey, compared to the national average of 30%.

The survey showed that farmer opinion of using NSAIDS was positive overall and that a key reason for using them was that the chance of recovery was increased. Focussing efforts on early treatment gives you better value for the cost of the NSAID by reducing the likelihood of a case of lameness becoming chronic. The chronic cases still benefit from NSAIDs as pain relief, but surgical treatment or culling are often necessary.

There is also evidence that by giving NSAIDs to cows at calving, you can reduce lameness in the subsequent lactation, improving welfare and cutting the cost of treatment. A lot of lameness is caused by damage that occurs around calving. Using NSAIDS will reduce inflammation that occurs in the foot following hormonal changes and increased standing times around calving. This can prevent lameness due to lesions such as sole bruising and ulcers from occurring later in lactation.

Training is also a contributing factor. Lameness outcomes can be significantly improved by training all members of your team in mobility scoring so that they are able to identify lame cows effectively.

This can lead to more consistent and effective lameness management strategies; if you see your herd every day, you can become habituated to the overall level of lameness present. Quick identification and preventative care will make a big difference to overall productivity and welfare.

1Griffiths BE, White DG, Oikonomou G. A cross-sectional study into the prevalence of dairy cattle lameness and associated herd-level risk factors in England and Wales. Front Vet Sci. 2018.

2 Bell N, Wilson J, Pedersen S. Update on the costs of sole ulcers through a review of the recent literature [Internet]. [cited 2023 Aug 1]. Available from: https://ahdb.org.uk/update-on-the-costs-of-sole-ulcers-through-a-review-of-the-recent-literature

In this edition...

⚠FLYSTRIKE CASES⚠

Clinical Signs

- Discoloured, moist fleece (or fibre in alpacas)
- Foul smell
- Visible fly eggs or maggots
- Traumatised/ damaged skin on closer inspection
- Isolation from rest of the group
- Signs of restlessness, irritation and discomfort

Prevention

- Preventative products such as Clik or Crovect
- Ensuring backends are kept clean and trimmed
- Shearing
- Prompt wound care and lameness treatment

CONTACT YOUR VET FOR MORE INFO

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New Research Targets Genetic Resistance to Maedi Visna (MV) in Sheep

You may already be aware but last year a groundbreaking £1.1 million research initiative last announced to combat Maedi Visna (MV), a chronic viral disease affecting sheep. This project, a collaboration between the University of Nottingham and the Moredun Research Institute, aims to develop genetic resistance to MV, potentially transforming sheep farming and enhancing animal welfare worldwide.

MV is a significant concern for sheep farmers, as it is difficult to detect and control due to a long latent period between infection and testing positive. In the UK, the number of affected flocks has increased sharply in the last 30 years, from 1.4% in 1995 to 9.4% in 2019. At least 1.6 million animals out of the UK's 32 million strong sheep flock are affected1.

Time to get technical! Central to this research is the TMEM154 gene, which encodes a protein associated with genetic resistance to MV. Sheep with two copies of the resistant allele (K/K genotype) show lower viral loads and reduced disease transmission. Primary data indicates varying frequencies of this resistant allele among UK breeds, with Dorset Horns at 90%, Scottish Blackface at 64%, and Texels at 15%2.

The project includes genotyping tests to identify the presence of the resistant allele in different breeds. This testing is cost-effective, at less than £30 per animal, and is being offered free for certain breeds lacking existing data. Breed societies and farmers are encouraged to participate as the findings will inform breeding strategies aimed at increasing MV resistance across the national flock.

By incorporating genetic resistance into breeding programs, this research seeks to provide a sustainable solution to MV, improving flock health and productivity. If you're interested in participating or learning more about the project, you can contact the University of Nottingham or the Moredun Research Institute for further information - https://moredun.org.uk/news/foundation/press-release-1-1m-funding-to-develop-genetic-solutions-for-maedi-visna-in-sheep

1 https://moredun.org.uk/news/foundation/press-release-1-1m-funding-to-develop-genetic-solutions-for-maedi-visna-in-sheep
2 https://nationalsheep.org.uk/assets/documents/Session-6b_Rachael-Tarlington_-MaediVisna_SBRT-2024_FINAL.pdf?v=1731928193

In this edition...

No bull - fertility test to ensure return on investment

There are a variety of reasons that bulls can fail fertility tests making it crucial to get them tested year on year.

Physical exam:

Initially, we examine a bulls general health status, including listening to heart and lungs, examination of the head and observation of locomotion. If they aren't healthy at the start of the breeding season, they don't stand a chance of keeping up during a busy breeding period. Similarly, if they are in poor body condition or have bad teeth, they are only going to get worse when they are asked to work hard – we all need to be in great shape during busy periods of our lives. This most importantly goes for locomotion - if they can't walk on four legs, they certainly won't be able to jump up on two!

Genitalia:

Next up is examination of the genitalia. This is important to ensure everything is in "full working order" - any heat, injuries or swellings can be identified, to give early indications of poor performance. Did you know that sperm production is closely related to testicular size? Testicular circumference is therefore one of the most important aspects of a breeding exam. In addition, it can be related to semen quality parameters, such as number of sperm, percentage of motile and morphologically normal sperm. Therefore, bulls with lower testicular circumference (under 32cm) are likely to suffer from lower fertility.

In addition, the penis should be examined to confirm normal anatomical structure, as abnormalities—such as a 'corkscrew penis'—can hinder the bull's ability to successfully inseminate cows.

Density of sperm and gross motility:

Following the more physical examination aspects, we take a closer look at the sperm. A good sperm sample will score at least three on the five point scale – the scale indicates how dense the sample appears and how well it moves. The ideal sample will appear as fast distinct swirls with continuous dark waves. A watery semen sample can suggest issues with quality, but it may also occur in bulls that have recently been active. To avoid this, ensure the bull has no access to cows the night before testing!

Motility (progressive):

This evaluates how effectively the sperm are moving. To pass, at least 60% must be swimming in a purposeful, forward direction. If only a few show this coordinated movement, it suggests there may not be enough viable sperm capable of reaching the egg. For perspective, if sperm were human-sized, the journey to the egg would be equivalent to swimming 435 miles!

Morphology:

Morphology looks at the shape of the sperm—are they built for the job? For good fertility, at least 70% should have a normal structure. Abnormalities like detached heads, double heads, or coiled tails can impact performance (after all, no one gets far swimming in circles!).

Why does bull testing matter? Simply put, it's about protecting your investment. Think of it as an insurance policy. Since only a small number of bulls are responsible for siring most of the calves, it's crucial that every bull in the team is performing at their best. Testing is straightforward, quick, and can be a highly cost-effective way to improve your chances of reproductive success

If you're interested in getting your bull or bulls tested speak to your vet or the practice to go through the logistics.

If you would like more information on what we've discussed in this month's newsletter, please speak to any of our farm veterinary team.

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