Liver fluke update

Liver fluke control continues to pose a real challenge to UK livestock producers. Slaughter house data shows that in some months over 25% of sheep livers and up to nearly 50% of cattle livers are condemned and in the vast majority of cases fluke is to blame.

The impact of fluke damage is not just confined to the lost income from condemned livers. Livestock with liver fluke have reduced feed conversion efficiency due to the damage caused by migrating flukes. Infested animals have reduced productivity which can be quantified in various ways for example they take longer and cost more to reach slaughter weights or in the case of milking animals suffer from reduced yields and milk quality.

It is these hidden losses in production which are the main cost of liver fluke. In addition heavy infestations with fluke can simply result in death.

Control of liver fluke involves a farm specific approach to the problem. The first step is to establish if your stock have fluke or not. The available options are:

• Test milk or blood for antibodies which indicates exposure at some stage historically, we currently have a few free test kits available for bulk milk.
• Check faeces for fluke eggs which indicates the presence of mature fluke, this test can be done in our own lab.
• Post mortem examination on stock which go for slaughter, your abattoir should report this routinely
• Post mortem examination of stock which die on farm unexpectedly Once you have established your herd/fluck status then speak to your vet and develop a control plan for your livestock.

EU regulations governing the use of flukicides in food producing animals have changed significantly. There are a limited number of products available for use in dairy cows (including dry cows and in calf heifers) so it is important that you are using something suitable which won’t result in milk residues but will give effective control. Speak to your vet or the staff at Beeston Animal Health for quality advice on which products are appropriate and legal.

Avoid Milk Fever this Autumn

Autumn has arrived and although there is plenty of grass at this time, it can be a nightmare for dry cow management due to the high calcium but low magnesium content of the grass.

It is well documented that good management of the transition period for the dry cow is essential for a healthy and productive milking period for the dry cow is essential to prime the cow’s body into mobilising her calcium reserves ready for when she calves and her demand for calcium more than doubles in a few hours.

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Practical tips for grazing dry cows:

• Cows in the first month of the dry period can generally cope with a higher level of grass intake than those closer to calving, but it is still recommended to keep them on the lowest quality pasture available. Use electric fences to limit grass access if necessary to control intakes.

• If possible, manage cows off grass for the last 3 weeks of the dry period.

• Tight stocking of 8-12 cows per hectare and sward height <7cm (if can’t see the cows hooves above the grass then it is too long). Just picking at grass and filling up on other forage BUT NOT GRASS SILAGE.

• Designated smaller old ley paddocks for dry cows that are not fertilised with slurry or potash, which are high in potassium.

• Use moderate to heavy nitrogen fertiliser (35-45kg/acre at harvest)

• Harvest grass twice a year in June and September as regrowth contains lowest potash, which are high in potassium.

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Focus on Parasite control in sheep

Last month we hosted a very interesting meeting on parasite control in sheep at The Swan in Tarporley. The meeting was very well attended indicating that this perpetual issue is still of interest to sheep producers and an area where the industry needs to be proactive.

The first part of the meeting focused on gut worms in sheep and how to maximise growth and performance in lambs without using unnecessary treatments. Our guest speaker was Matt Williams, a vet who works with Zoetis Animal Health.

Matt reported the findings of several recent surveys across the UK which highlighted how widespread worm resistance is and how in many cases there is resistance to more than one group of worms. The key message from this part of the talk was that every farm resistance pattern is different and you need to establish which worms work on your farm by doing pre and post treatment fecal egg counts.

The more often a product is used on farm then the more opportunity there is for resistance to develop. Therefore it is best not to worm at all unless you really need to e.g. scoursing lambs, high FEC and poor growth rates. This not only slows down the rate of wormer resistance but also saves you money on unnecessary treatments.

We were reminded of the SCOPS guidelines for wormer use in sheep and that it is best not to worm at all unless you really need to e.g. scoursing lambs, high FEC and poor growth rates. This not only slows down the rate of resistant worms rather than just resistant worms which is what happens with dose and move.

Another development in worm control is the use of dual action wormers such as Startect from Zoetis. This product contains two active ingredients which are new to the UK. The principle behind dual active products is that worms which survive the first active ingredient are likely to be taken out by the second active ingredient resulting in very few worms surviving the treatment or in other words a more effective treatment.

We also launched a new interactive fluke and worm control planner. This is a specially designed software program which can be used by vets and the qualified staff at Beeston Animal Health to help you with parasite control in your flock. Contact Mark PASS at BAHF for more details about this new service.

No doubt many of you are aware of the Stamp out Scab campaign which is on-going. The second half of our meeting was part of that campaign and involved a review of how scab has re-emerged from near eradication to becoming a relatively common problem.

Symptoms include itching/ scratching, wool loss and weight loss. Diagnosis requires microscopic examination of a skin scrape to differentiate between scab and lice as the treatments are different.

The scab mite is very robust and can survive sufficiently well to cause reinfection for up to 18 days in the environment! This reinfection potential is one of the key reasons for the increasing prevalence of scab as many of the injectable treatments don’t have a long acting effect. The advice is to speak to your vet and get a skin scraping done to confirm the diagnosis and decide on a suitable treatment plan using a long acting injectable where appropriate.

Update on Livestock Northwest Health Planning Scheme

SAC have confirmed that health planning delivery under the Livestock Programme scheme has now been extended until the end of December 2013 at least. The previous deadline was the end of October.

All indications are that there is going to be another round of FFIS opening at the start of November with the scheme handbook released nationally on the DEFRA website from mid-October. To check this follow the following link to the DEFRA site: http://rpopenetwork.defra.gov.uk/funding-sources

The scheme will be open to application for 8 weeks so the end of December is likely to be the final date for grant submissions. However, with Christmas falling within this period the window may be extended till mid-January.

It is a requirement that all farmers wishing to apply for the scheme have an up to date livestock northwest health and welfare action plan (completed in the last 12 months) to be eligible for the scheme. If you intend to access the grant scheme then you need to act now to get your health plan completed on time to support any possible application.

The health plan options are:

- General Health plan - £250 lab testing & analysis budget
- Health plan review – Short intervention in updating a health plan which has expired past the 12 month grant requirement - £125 lab testing budget
- Johne’s focused health plan – 30 cow screen - £250 lab testing budget
- BVD focused health plan - PI hunt - £250 lab testing budget

So far DEFRA have not indicated what items will be eligible for grant funding or what level of funding will be available. In previous rounds funding has been at 40% and investments in cluster flush systems, cushions and cubicles/ mattresses have all been accepted so it seems reasonable to expect similar criteria this time round.

Contact SAC directly to register your interest

Telephone or Email SAC, who will then send you a registration form in the post. Call 08456 040 535 or email Ian.Cairns@SAC.co.uk

Training for Polish farm workers

In response to a couple of requests from clients we have organised some training for farm workers who speak Polish as their first language. Good communication and training are both vital to the success of the staff team in any business and your farm is no exception. We can now confirm the two dates for our Polish training days.

Monday 14th October, 09.30-14.30 hosted by Rob Filton, Dairy Farm, Wharton Tuesday 15th October, 10.00 - 15.00 hosted by J. Richardson, Church Farm, Warrington

The plan is to cover various aspects of relevant health and husbandry including udder health, heat detection and calf management. The course content is the same both days; simply choose which date suits best for your staff.

The training will be delivered in Polish by a Polish vet and is kindly sponsored by Zoetis Animal Health. Course notes will also be available to back up what is discussed on the day and these are in Polish and English.

Lunch will be provided and there will be no charge for the training on this occasion. Limited numbers are available so get on to Sally to book your staff on to one of these very useful training days. We are very grateful to our two host farms for allowing us access to their farms for these events.

Avoid Milk Fever this Autumn

Continued from front page

- Magnesium supplementation in the form of concentrates, bullets, licks and/or in water (be aware of small water troughs and one or two cows emptying them). Cows need 80g/day of magnesium chloride
- Reduce DCAB by giving maize slage/whole crop as buffer feed and balance with other feedstuffs e.g. cereals, rape, sugar beet pulp and straw
- Check phosphorus concentration is not >0.5% as high levels will reduce vitamin D activation and calcium absorption
- Give Bovikalc boluses to all at risk cows
- Check 3rd lactation cows
- Monitor cows on suitable transition diet by blood sampling cows within 48 hours of calving to check calcium levels
- DON’T feed milking cow ration mixed with straw to dry cows as calcium levels are TOO HIGH!

Ketosis in dairy cows

Ketosis or slow fever as we call it in these parts is an all too common disease that we see when called to see sick fresh cows. Surveys in the UK have shown the incidence of sub clinical ketosis to be as high as 30%. Ketosis is most commonly found in the first 14 days after calving and is considered to be a major risk factor for many of the other conditions we see in fresh cows such as LDAs, metritis, milk loss and even culling.

If you would like to learn more about Ketosis and more importantly how you can reduce the risk of ketosis in your herd then why not come to our Ketosis meeting on 16th October at 19.00 for 19.30 start at the Hunters Lodge, Crewe.

As always the bar will be open and refreshments will be provided. Call Sally at Hartford on 01606 723200 to book your place.