PRACTICE INITIATIVE

Updates:
You may have seen the posters about what we are doing as a practice ‘behind the scenes’ to drive forwards reductions in disease levels on our farms, here are some updates on a few of our initiatives.

Willows Vet Group has been named a top supporting practice of the BVD Free England campaign which you will have read about in national press.

We continue to screen herds for BVD, and where necessary, hunt for those Persistently Infected (PI) animals that are still prevalent and maintaining the disease amongst the national herd. Scotland and Ireland have made the BVD Free scheme compulsory, showing the level of importance they place on eradicating the disease. The costs from sub-fertile cows, abortions, increased disease due to immunosuppression, respiratory disease in youngstock and uneven growth rates are vast. Markets are beginning to see a good lift in the value of animals certified as BVD free, and soon herds accredited free will gain from this status with people seeking to ensure they do not buy in PI animals. For more information on how to sign up to the BVD free England Scheme, or to find out your current BVD status, please engage with anyone in the vet team.

In our most recent newsletter articles we spoke of the upcoming challenges of Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD) and some of the new tools we have available to combat this costly disease. New diagnostics have improved our ability to isolate the bacteria and viruses causing respiratory disease.

These samples can be collected from live affected animals or, more accurately, from post mortem examinations we can quickly carry out on farm. A rise in cases already this year has seen many post mortem examinations taking place at the practice, all of which have highlighted pathogenic organisms. Environmental assessments and bespoke vaccination protocols are being put in place to protect against further losses.

New vaccines are also available to help increase livestock resistance to certain farm specific causes of pneumonia. Whilst vaccination allows us to increase the resistance of a population, it is also important to optimise the environmental conditions of all stock.

Housing appraisals are becoming increasingly important to fine tune the systems we use to rear our most valuable, replacement stock. With temperatures now dropping, and calves at increasing risk over the upcoming months, if you are unsure whether you could be doing more to grow your animals in the most economically efficient way, then please get in touch with your regular vet to discuss your options to safeguard against financial losses.

Pneumonia is the biggest disease threat to youngstock after 30 days of life, having large impacts on growth rates, and therefore, age at first calving.
Transition Cows

The majority of sick cow disease comes from the vast changes that occur to cows during the ‘Vital 90 Days’—60 days pre-calving and 30 days post-calving. This is a true physiological pinch point for cows. Dairy cows are (repeated!) metabolic powerhouses, whose peak yield energy requirements are up to 5.5 times maintenance levels (Consider Olympic athletes rarely require more than 2-3 times maintenance).

The hormonal, mineral and metabolic alterations that occur over this relatively short period are difficult to manage in every animal that passes through the system, at all times of the year. Even in an all-year-round calving herd there are peaks and troughs in calving, which increases and decreases pressure on calving facilities. Regardless of system, when there is a shortfall in energy consumed by the cows, there is an increased negative energy balance, which results in reduced peak milk yields and increased periparturient disease—i.e. reduced profits! We continue to monitor energy levels in fresh cows through a variety of methods, from milk recording analysis and sick cow ketone levels to disease records on farm.

Some businesses use full metabolic profiles as a strategy to track whole herd energy status, allowing us to pin point exactly where the problems are occurring, and from this, form concise actions. There are many management factors including lying and feed space, water availability and quality as well as social pressures which can have an enormous impact of fresh cow performance. Nutritional appraisal is also key to providing these high-risk animals with every chance of a successful, profitable lactation. For your independent farm specific transition appraisal, please get in touch with your regular vet— we will develop a short action list, agreed by you, and provide the necessary monitoring to show the benefits.

Willows Online

As we move ever closer to 2020, an online presence is becoming increasingly important for many businesses and we are no exception! A big thank you to the 91 people (so far) who took part in our website survey, which we emailed out last week. The results so far show that:

- 91% of people use the internet daily, often while they are on the go
- People use our website for a variety of reasons, including to find contact details for the practice, to learn about upcoming events and to find technical information.
- 87% people would see themselves using our website in the future

• The majority said that the aesthetics of the practice’s website contribute to their overall image and perception of the practice.
• It’s not too late to have your say so please respond if you have a minute to spare, if you haven’t received the email, and would like to then please call the practice and ask to be added to the email mailing list.
  (This is the first time we have emailed you using our updated database and we were really pleased with the response! We promise never to email you things that we don’t think will be of use or interest to you, but if you feel as though you would like to be taken off the mailing list you can reply to the email and ask to be removed.)

*In the coming months we will also be looking to send the newsletter out by email, but we will continue to post you a copy as well.*

Gwaredu BVD

Funded by the Welsh government’s Rural Development Programme, Gwaredu BVD is a new initiative to eradicate BVD from the Welsh national herd. For clients with a Welsh holding number (S6/) the programme offers support for classification of a herd’s BVD status and identification of a Persistently Infected animal if active infection is shown to be present.

In the first instance, this usually involves blood testing 5 animals of 9-18 months old, per management group, to screen for BVD infection. The testing regime is designed to fit in with your TB test, blood can be taken at TT1 and results reported by TT2. We are sending out letters before TB tests to explain the process in more detail, in the meantime please speak to your vet if you have any questions.