Every October, farm animal vets from across the world get together to share recent research outcomes and discuss new ideas in numerous areas of veterinary medicine and farm management. Sam and Darrell were there to represent the Willows, with Sam presenting a session at this prestigious event (see overleaf). Here, Sam brings you the take home messages from all the new information presented at the conference.

**B.V.C.A. Congress Roundup**

**What is in your milk powder?**
- Protein % and fat %? Big impact on growth rates.
- Ingredients? Milk proteins better than plant proteins.
- Ash content and fibre content? Good indicator of the quality of the powder.
- Speak to your vet if you are unsure!

**Fever Tags**
- Ear tag with temperature probe that allows early identification of animals with pneumonia.
- Tag will flash red if temperature >39.7°C for more than 6 hours.
- Early treatment reduces long term lung damage.
- Speak to your vet if you are interested – requires some training!

**Will my down cow get up?**
Two factors have been found to be critical to successful management of down cows:
1. Early diagnosis of the cause and any secondary damage (nerve damage, muscle damage)
2. Quality of nursing care
   - Soft, deep, hygienic bedding
   - Small, sheltered area
   - Changing the side the cow is lying on regularly
   - Food and clean water provided at all times

**CODD (Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis) in Sheep**
- Similar bacteria to DD in cattle
- Risk factors: flock size, DD in cattle, buying in, co-infection with footrot

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- Cull repeat offenders
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Despite this being the British CATTLE veterinary association, the sheep still got a mention . . .

**Graham Witter has once again transformed his family home, farm buildings and garden into a magical Winter wonderland to raise money for the Donna Louise Children’s Hospice, a cause very close to his heart. Graham started his festive fundraising back in 2013 for his sister Jessica who had cardio-facio cutaneous syndrome, severe epilepsy and multiple complex health needs. Jessica was fascinated by colour, light and sound. Sadly Jessica passed away in 2015 but Graham continued with the event in memory of his sister and to raise much needed funds for the hospice which provided support for the family and care for Jessica through her illness.**

Bring your family and friends along between 1st and 28th December (6.15pm – 9.00pm). Santa visits every Friday, Saturday and Sunday and the last few days before Christmas and children can have their own ‘selfie’ with the big man. Other attractions include Santa’s workshop grotto, festive music, mince pies, sweets, chocolates and festive ice cream, a unique festive vintage van plus lights galore and animated characters. So come and join in the fun at Carter’s Green Farm, Jack Lane, Weston, Crewe CW2 5LE. Entry is by donation.
Focus on weaning to give your heifers the best start

Sam recently completed a study which looked at the effect of different weaning methods on the post-weaning growth rate of dairy heifer calves. He was invited to present the findings at the BCVA Congress and explains more below:

Why did you do the study?

There is increasing evidence that early life factors have a significant impact on long term performance in ruminants. In the dairy sector, a number of studies have shown correlations between early life growth rates in heifers and lifetime yield, fertility and longevity. Over the 2 years at the Willows I have seen a huge range of different criteria for weaning calves (age, weight, concentrate intake dependent) and a range of weaning methods (abrupt, gradual, STEP). Weaning is a critical time for a calf, transitioning from effectively a single-stomached animal to a ruminant, and calves often seem to go backwards around this time. The aim of the study was to compare abrupt weaning with a 7 day gradual weaning protocol to assess the effect on post-weaning growth rates.

What did you do?

96 heifer calves were split into 2 groups for weaning: Abrupt (A) weaning and 7 day Gradual weaning (G). Calves were weighed at birth, 9 weeks (weaning age), 13 weeks and 17 weeks of age.

What did you find?

Pre-weaning, both groups of calves grew at the same rate. Post-weaning, the gradually weaned calves (0.95kg/day) grew significantly faster than abruptly weaned calves (0.87kg/day) for the 8 weeks post-weaning (9-17wk GR) – see graph. This finding is in keeping with similar literature, with overwhelming evidence that gradual weaning is superior to abrupt weaning. The main reasons for this are that gradual weaning allows calves time to adjust to becoming a ruminant, encourages intake of solid feed, and reduces stress associated with milk removal.