Preparing for Lambing

By Gethin Edwards

Housing
If you are housing your ewes ensure that you have plenty of clean, dry bedding which helps to minimise disease such as lameness, watery mouth, joint ill, coccidiosis.

Nutrition
The last six weeks of pregnancy is when 75% of a lamb’s growth occurs in the womb, therefore the right nutrition during this period is essential, to ensure an appropriate lamb birth weight and good quality colostrum. Getting the nutrition correct by assessing your ewes’ Body Condition Score (BCS) in relation to how many lambs she is carrying will improve the quality of the colostrum and reduce lambing losses. Consider blood sampling 6-10 ewes 4 weeks pre lambing to check that the diet is supplying enough energy and protein. If not then increased problems with twin lamb disease and mastitis may occur. Monitor ewes for signs of prolapses, twin lamb disease and calcium deficiency which may indicate that things are not going as planned.

Clinical signs of pregnancy toxaemia (twin lamb disease) - listed as the disease progresses.
• Does not come to feed trough
• Isolated,
• Dull and depressed
• Blind
• Head pressing
• Fine muscle tremors of the head
• Weakness and recumbency
• Death

Treatment of twin lamb
Treat accordingly with ketosis/propylene glycol drench (50-100ml/day) and “calcium” injection (50-80ml CMD20 under the skin). If you require further advice just call one of the vets.

Lambing Equipment
Ensure you have all the correct equipment prior to lambing.
• Arm length disposable plastic gloves
• Clean bucket, warm water, soap, approved surgical scrub solution (e.g. Hibiscrub), towel
• A lambing snare (various designs are available)
• Lambing ropes
• Obstetrical lubricant
• Disposable syringes, needles, antibiotics, analgesics, Calcium/Magnesium/Glucose bottle.
• Ketosis (twin lamb) drench
• Harnesses/retainers/suture material for vaginal prolapses
• Respiratory stimulants/ revivers.
• Stomach tubes, feed bottles/teats.

We have put together the essentials in a handy lambing tool box so you can have all your gear in one place and move it around easily – please call the practice for more information.

I spent most of my youth chasing some suckler cows and sheep around the family hill farm in North Wales, working in the fresh air was where I wanted to be! After surviving five years at Glasgow, I qualified in 2004 with an interest in bovine reproduction. I spent my first years along the Welsh Borders doing mainly mixed Dairy, Beef and Sheep work before heading to North Wales for 5 years for a mainly farm job where I gained experience with Sheep AI work. Wanting to develop my knowledge further and provide better service to farming clients, I became a DairyCo Mastitis Control Plan deliverer and completed a two year Diploma in Bovine Reproduction (DBR) at Liverpool University, whilst also moving over the border to Cheshire. Since I have been working for the Willows, we have, in conjunction with Mark Pass from Beeston Animal Health, developed the Willows Sheep Club, a proactive approach to sheep health and production. I still keep my “hand-in” with all things Bovine and also assist with the Embryo Transfer side of the practice. Maintaining a healthy and profitable farm is key for success and I aim to help our clients achieve this.

Prudent Antibiotic Use
The farming and veterinary profession are becoming under increased pressure to reduce the amount of antibiotics used prophylactically which are used in food producing animals, be this Dry Cow Therapy in Milking Cows or blanket treatment of all ewes/lambs at lambing time. Although there are some diseases where blanket treatment of all stock is required e.g. outbreak of Enzootic Abortion, the emphasis from some Supermarkets and buyers is very much on prevention rather than cure. This means that optimal management and vaccination of ewes and lambs at lambing will become more critical as the need to reduce antibiotic use becomes more important.
It doesn't seem long since the flies have left the farm, and in some cases, been replaced by a similar number of starlings! Now is the time to begin cleaning up the farm to reduce potential breeding grounds for flies. By tidying muck heaps and employing new strategies for fly control, focused on reduction of fly numbers at their larval stage, there can be large gains in productivity and reduced spend over the summer months.

Our usual applications of pour-on fly control products have good efficacy, provided they are used prior to large numbers of flies emerging, and used regularly enough to protect the herd throughout the season, without a break in the barrier. However, as soon as defences are gone fly numbers rise at an alarming rate. Often the adult cow population are well protected, but youngstock bear the brunt of the problem, as they are more difficult to handle and apply products.

To truly reduce fly numbers on farm, we have a new service available involving parasitic wasp introduction. These small insects are distributed amongst the breeding grounds, and feed on the fly larvae prior to their hatching, and therefore reduce numbers on farm. It is a common strategy used on poultry farms and there has been increasing uptake across the dairy sector.

The service involves regular dispersal of the insect pupae at two weekly intervals, throughout the season. The effects are cumulative, with those farms with optimal dung management, strategic use of pour-on products (particularly in the first year), and targeted parasitic wasp dispersal annually, seeing the greatest response due to marked reduction in numbers over several years.

Flies can seriously limit milk production of dairy herds, and enormous reductions in youngstock growth rates can be associated with fly worry - we all know too well how frustrating they can be! In addition to this, they are an important cause of mastitis and New Forest Eye (‘pink eye’) infections.

Hopefully you can still remember the issues in your herd associated with flies last year, it is likely to be a similar problem in 2018, so speak to your regular vet or Jonny Duncan for more information on how to have an effective ‘spring clean’ of the farm, to reduce your long-term fly product spend, and most importantly increase your bottom line.

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**Free uploads to BVDFree database**

English beef and dairy farmers can have their Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) test results uploaded to the national BVDFree database without charge until the end of March.

The offer is open to all farmers who register with the BVDFree England scheme and is available for all results uploaded by the following labs: APHA, Biobest, CIS and NML. Farmers can register with the scheme at bvdfree.org.uk. The aim is to grow the number of searchable BVD statuses on the existing 65,000 strong database.

Farmers don’t need to wait for the outcome of existing testing as they’re able to have any results from the previous 12 months uploaded. To get future results automatically uploaded they will need to be sent to the lab on a BVDFree submission form https://bvdfree.org.uk/designated-laboratories/ Bill Mellor, BVDFree Chairman, said: “We can only eliminate BVD from the national herd if farmers test their animals and load their results onto the central database. By removing the cost, we hope this is the final encouragement farmers need to take part in this crucial scheme.

“With the busy spring sale period approaching, farmers can often command an additional premium for animals known to be BVD free as well as giving buyers confidence in the status of purchased animals.”

Farmers whose results are on the database can sell their animals with a known BVD status, which is especially important for those in the North of England as Scottish buyers require English animals to be tested for BVD. For more information please speak to one of the vets.