



Preparing to house youngstock over winter

The upcoming winter period presents several challenges for calves. Diseases such as pneumonias and scour are partly caused by a poor environment, and effective housing can help reduce disease.

Colder conditions can result in slower growing, weaker calves. The low end of the thermoneutral zone is 10°C under four weeks - below this, energy is required to keep warm. This decreases total energy available to the calf, which could be used for growth and immune system function. Deep and dry bedding (where the calves can nest), helps to maintain temperature, as well as jackets where required. It is important with jackets to remember the calf must be dry before dressed, and to always wash between use to avoid transmission of diseases.

Fresh air is also necessary and helps in preventing respiratory disease. Good ventilation - to remove stale, humid air - helps to ensure bacteria and viruses cannot survive. It is important however, to avoid cold drafts - especially under doors and gates as this will be at calf lying level. Humidity can also be reduced by ensuring good drainage and minimising any standing water in the pens.

Taking steps to protect calves from the cold and ensuring that they are warm and dry will reduce the risk of disease and help maintain the growth rates which are vital for long-term performance.

Dates for the Diary

(Please contact the St Columb Office if you would like further information on any of these courses on 01637 889 231)

29th September-1st October

3-day DIY AI Course Location TBC (Bodmin area)

8th October

Safe and Responsible use of Medicine Course 10am-2pm Callington

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Cycling success. The marginal differences

Dan Stevenson takes a sideways look at dairying with a comparison to performance cycling

What do farmers and Olympic track cyclists have in common? The answer is not 'the feeling of going round in circles without ever getting anywhere', it is in fact the application of the concept of 'marginal gains'.

There is no doubting the success of the Great Britain track cycling team in the 2012 Olympics, with seven gold medals together with one silver and one bronze, but you may question how this can be applied to farming. Much of this success has been attributed to the 'aggregation of marginal gains' as employed by Dave Brailsford, the then Performance Director of British Cycling. This involves breaking down the performance of each athlete and looking for every opportunity to make tiny improvements in each area. Although small and seemingly insignificant on their own the sum of these gains adds up to a significant competitive advantage. Examples include cleaning the thin layer of dust from tyres to give extra grip and heated shorts that prevent muscle damage after hard exercise.

When looking at farming enterprises, in any sector, what sets those achieving the best figures apart from their contemporaries is never a single factor, rather slightly better performance in several areas. It can be tempting to look for the 'silver bullet' or 'magic powder' to cure all issues holding a unit back. For example, if we could only build a new shed or if we only had the right soil to grow a new wonder-variety of forage.

However, greater improvements can be made by breaking down each area of farm activity and looking for small alterations that can be made in each area. In contrast to the big investments and infrastructure changes (which are still very helpful if and when they are possible) these small changes are often cheap to do and easy to implement and the effect is often greater than the sum of the parts. A 1% improvement made in 50 areas rather than a single, 50% improvement.



The beauty of the marginal gains concept is that it can be applied to every farm, anyone can do it and improvements are nearly always possible. The options are almost endless but some examples would include:

- **In the area of fertility:** utilising heat detection aids like tail paint, making it the responsibility of everyone to look for bulling cows, spending 20 minutes extra a day spotting them.
- **Feed intakes:** an extra two push-ups a day, feeding at a different time to increase feed availability at key times of the day, altering the feed barrier or feeding surface.
- **Lameness:** changing milking order or groupings to minimise standing times, using a hand-scraper to get at those hard to reach areas, changing tractor scraping protocol to get rid of that pool of muck that all cows have to traverse on the way back from the parlour, injecting lame sheep as soon as they are spotted.
- **Weaning weights:** offer hard feed from an early age, feed a higher volume of milk.

Obviously, this approach is something most people are doing all the time without perhaps realising it but consciously breaking down every individual area and going through it this way will bring about further improvements. Perhaps pick an area and apply the marginal gains approach next time you have a vet on the farm, or your next health review. It would be great to hear about some of the 1% improvements people have made that have amounted to sizeable improvements.

Rams at the Ready

Whilst ram genetics are important and looks are not everything, you do need to look at your rams pre-tupping.

Sperm production and maturation takes 7-8 weeks, so ideally "Ram MOTs" should start ten weeks ahead, with more detailed examination two to four weeks pre-tupping.

Consider the five Ts:

- Toes - soundness, conformation
- Teeth - especially molar cheek teeth; and other things around the head - pinkeye, CLA lumps etc
- Testicles - see below!
- Tone - BCS 3.0 - 3.5, fit not fat
- Treat - quarantine and treatments. Purchase far enough ahead to be able to protect your flock

Testicular size correlates well with fertility. Mature lowland rams should have a scrotal circumference of at least 36cm. Have a feel - they should be equal in size and consistency, feel like ripe plums and each one should be around the size of a coke can. We offer training in ram exams if you are unsure!

If you run single sire mating groups, use high ewe:ram ratios or have just purchased a new ram, we recommend semen collection and evaluation. This is well tolerated and allows an assessment of how well the sperm are swimming and how likely they are to make it to the egg.

The 5 Ts of Ram Testing.

Treatment

Rams can become overly hot during summer months, which can lead to testicular degeneration and inevitably poor fertility. Various methods can be used to help combat heat stress in the ram such as shearing, ensuring adequate shade and water access and avoiding over-fat rams. Finally, ensure that the ram is included in any vaccination (clostridial and pasteurilla) and parasite programmes.

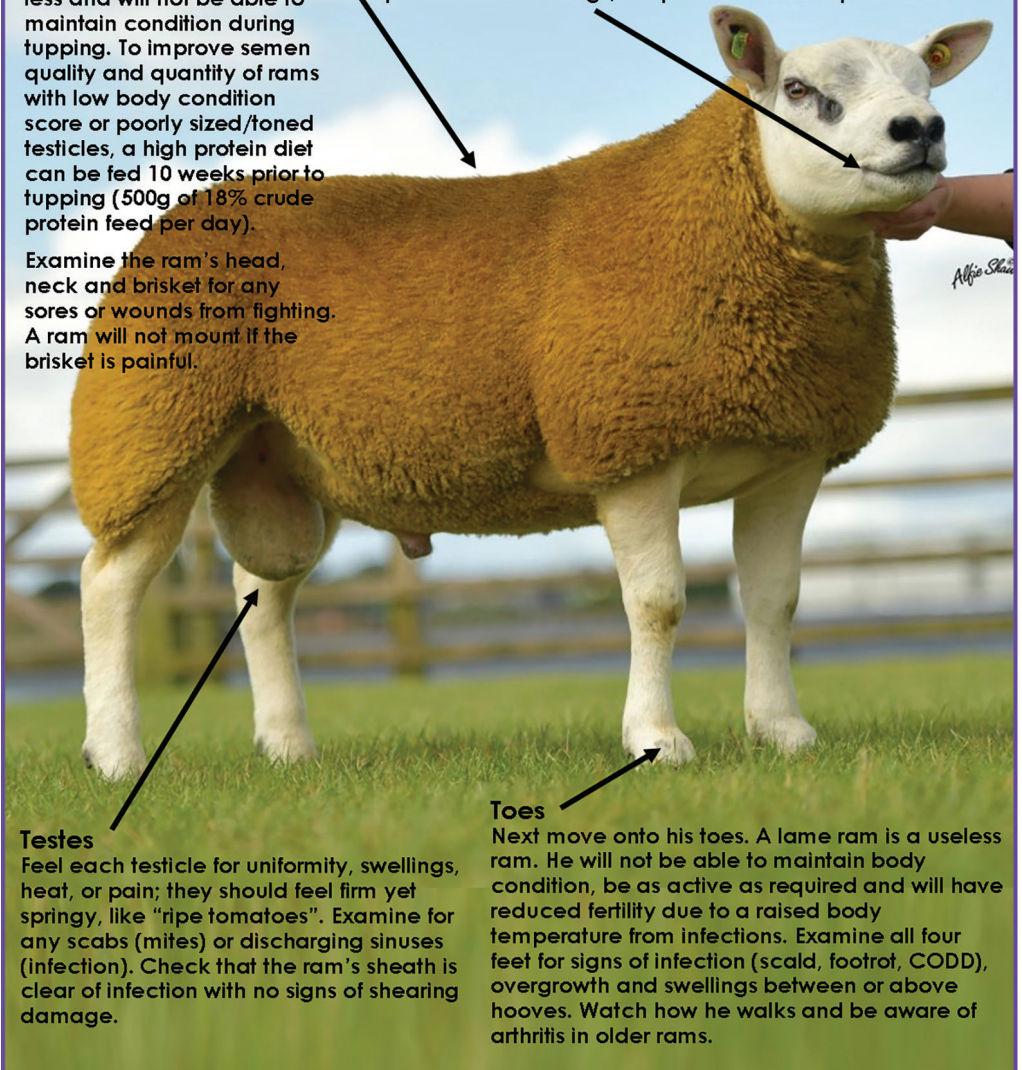
Tone

Aim for a body condition score of 3.0-3.5 (spine well covered), as rams will feed less and will not be able to maintain condition during tupping. To improve semen quality and quantity of rams with low body condition score or poorly sized/toned testicles, a high protein diet can be fed 10 weeks prior to tupping (500g of 18% crude protein feed per day).

Examine the ram's head, neck and brisket for any sores or wounds from fighting. A ram will not mount if the brisket is painful.

Teeth

Firstly, start with the teeth - a full mouth means a full belly! Are all the incisors present and do they meet the dental pad? Feel along the upper and lower jaw to check for the presence of swellings, lumps or associated pain.



Testes

Feel each testicle for uniformity, swellings, heat, or pain; they should feel firm yet springy, like "ripe tomatoes". Examine for any scabs (mites) or discharging sinuses (infection). Check that the ram's sheath is clear of infection with no signs of shearing damage.

Toes

Next move onto his toes. A lame ram is a useless ram. He will not be able to maintain body condition, be as active as required and will have reduced fertility due to a raised body temperature from infections. Examine all four feet for signs of infection (scald, footrot, CODD), overgrowth and swellings between or above hooves. Watch how he walks and be aware of arthritis in older rams.

We provide this service at a cost of £48.50 for the first ram, subsequent rams £37.10; morphology (examination of individual sperm) if indicated is £15.90. Call us to book!

What's in your clamps?

Leaving the feeding of your milking cows and other classes of stock to chance, will only lead to disaster..... so, what can you do to inform your nutritional decisions?



It goes back to the “measure, monitor, manage” mantra that should be at the heart of every farming business - without it how can you make an informed management decision?

Regular analysis (ideally monthly), of your silage or other forage crops allows for a more accurate formulation of the diet. Thus, ensuring nutrients are not undersupplied or wasted, due to clamp variations, both of which can be costly due to milk losses or feed wastage. Even when silage is clamped to the highest standards, changes occur during storage throughout the winter-feeding period, whether we are looking at grass silage, maize or even wholecrop - and that is before we even consider the variations in different fields or cutting dates. (Silage Analysis is available through Kingshay, visit www.kingshay.com/shop).

It is not just a case of knowing what quality silage you have got in the clamp; it is equally important to know how much you have. How can you be sure you have sufficient feed to see your cows through

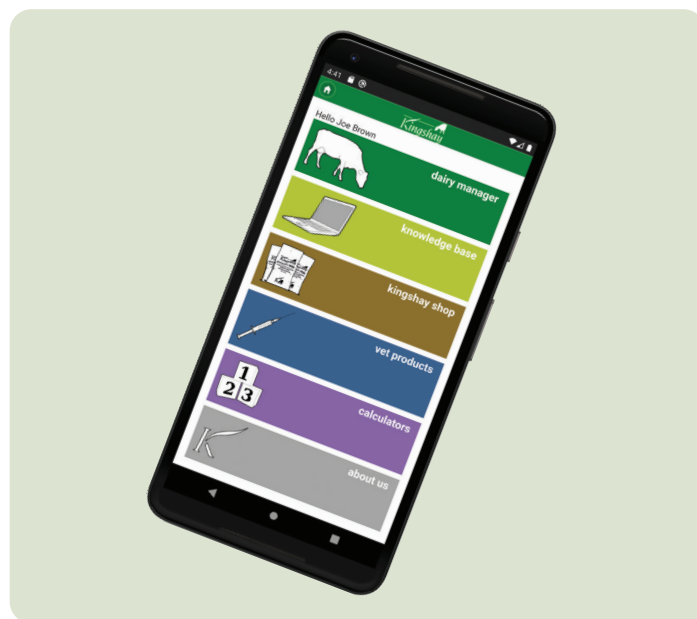
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to turnout? And, if you haven't got enough, what can you do now to maximise stocks for the winter? There has never been a more pertinent time to calculate your current forage stocks and compare with your expected forward requirements.

Calculating supplies against likely demand is essential. What is fundamentally a difficult calculation is made easier, by using the 'Silage Requirements Calculator' on the Kingshay App. This help you work out silage requirements and silage stocks as well as likely availability of further cuts from standing crops.

The key is to plan and act now - find out if you're facing a shortfall and work early to address it; any delay will be detrimental to both cow management and input costs.

The Kingshay App is available for iPhone or android and is free to download. Visit our website to find out more <https://www.kingshay.com/advice/the-kingshay-app/>



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