

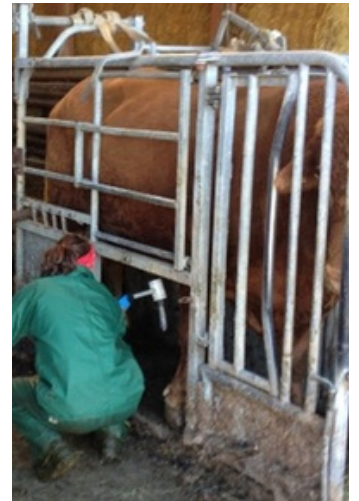
How good is your bull - does he really make the grade?

A fully fertile bull should be able to run with 50 cows and get 60% of them pregnant within 3 weeks of turnout. Identifying a sub-fertile or infertile bull prior to breeding season can increase profitability and help avoid significant economic losses. Tightening the calving block means more calves are born earlier in the season resulting in:

- Increased revenue by finishing calves earlier
- Reduced disease levels by minimising age spread, so scours and pneumonia are less likely to pass from older to younger calves
- Having calves of the same age allows more straightforward feeding and more standardised carcass conformation
- Vaccination programmes can be more accurately targeted

Pre-breeding examinations should be carried out 8-6 weeks before the intended breeding season. This allows time to recover from temporary ailments or to source and quarantine a replacement if a more permanent problem is identified. Identifying a sub-fertile bull is as important as identifying an infertile bull. Adaptations to the breeding season can then be made to improve pregnancy rates, for example by reducing numbers of cows to be served by that bull.

Bull testing involves a clinical and reproductive tract exam and semen analysis. Animals must be over 15 months old and have not been working for at least 14 days. The bull must be restrained in a side opening crush with nearby access to hard standing and electricity to enable semen analysis immediately after collection. We are also happy to test bulls pre-sale or pre/post purchase.



Will your Heifers cause you a headache? Using Pelvimetry to pick your replacements

Selecting an appropriate bull and ensuring that he is firing on all cylinders is just one half of breeding your replacement heifers.

If planning to calve heifers at 24 months, it is important to ensure heifers are well grown and at 50% of their expected adult weight by 12 months of age. This will ensure they have reached puberty and started cycling well before being put to the bull at 14-15 months of age. It is also important to ensure the heifer's pelvic area is large enough for her to calve naturally and unassisted. The size of the pelvis is a heritable trait in cattle meaning it is passed down the family line, and pelvic growth occurs at approximately 1cm³ / month so heifers that are too small will never catch up and may require a caesarean at calving.

We are able to measure the size of the pelvic area of your heifers - a technique called 'pelvimetry', using a large set of callipers and calculate whether her pelvic area should be large enough for calving. This can be done from 13 months of age and up and allows you to pick out and avoid breeding from animals that are too small and reduce the risk of requiring a caesarean or assistance on farm at calving time.

If you would like more information regarding what is involved in either Bull Breeding Soundness Exam or Heifer Pelvimetry, please contact the Farm Office to speak to a vet.

In this edition

Minimising losses at lambing

After our scorching summer, scanning results may be a little lower than usual – making it even more important to make every lamb count this lambing season.

Having ewes in optimum condition is the first step in improving lamb survival, as ewes in good body condition will have better colostrum quality and mothering ability, and reduced risk of prolapse. With feed costs high, use a combination of silage analysis, regular body condition scoring and scanning results to guide concentrate feeding, and create groups to be fed at different rates. Silage energy content can vary considerably, and lowland ewes in BCS 3.0 (even if twin bearing) on good quality silage may not need much concentrate. Please note that mineral supplementation may be required as concentrate is a major source of trace elements. Always ensure there is enough trough space – 15cm per ewe for forage, 45cm for ewe for concentrate.

Colostrum is the “magic bullet” that provides not only energy to newborn lambs, but also vital immunity against a whole host of diseases, in particular watery mouth. Lambs should receive 50ml/kg in the first 6 hours of life. If ewes’ supply is insufficient, top ups are required. Colostrum from your own ewes is best – this can be frozen (flat in bags, to make defrosting quick and easy – care not to heat above 37°C) for future use. If using your own cows’ colostrum, mix supply from 2-3 cows to minimise the risk of haemolytic anaemia. If neither of these options are available, use a powdered version.

Not all brands are equal and not all contain any actual immunity – Immucol and Lamaid both contain high levels of freeze-dried colostrum and are reliable options.

Joint ill can be minimised through careful hygiene and navel dressing. As well as liming and re-bedding individual pens between occupants, keeping bedding as clean and dry as possible in the main pen is vital, as this is where lambs tend to be born. Cleanliness of tailing rings and ear tags is also important. Navels should be dipped (or sprayed, but it is harder to achieve good coverage with sprays) with 10% iodine; adding 25ml surgical spirit per litre can aid drying. Recheck after 24 hours and re-dip if not dry.

Sadly, Spectam remains unavailable. Antibiotics can do as much harm as good, as they remove protective bacteria as well as disease-causing ones, and colostrum remains the single best defence against disease. However as lambing progresses, antibiotics may be required.



Betamox LA is the recommended alternative and can be administered into the muscle at 0.5ml per 5kg for any lambs of concern, and Metacam under the skin at 0.25ml per 5kg (off license).

Should any abortions occur, remove all aborted material and contaminated bedding immediately, and isolate ewes away from others. Placenta is most useful when diagnosing the cause of abortion, so bring this to the practice as well as aborted lambs if investigation is required.

Ewes should be vaccinated in late pregnancy against Clostridial disease +/- Pasteurella pneumonia. This will provide lambs with immunity for the first 3-4 months of life (shorter for pneumonia), after which vaccination of lambs is required.

Services we can offer to help you at lambing time:

Lamb ewe - £45 ex. VAT

Ewe caesarean - £70 ex. VAT

(Does not include medicines or visit / out of hours call back to surgery)

Navels

Strong (10%, or minimum 7%) Iodine with a little surgical spirit added (25ml per litre) is the best navel dressing, ideally applied as a dip rather than a spray. We can have a limited supply of Strong Iodine (500ml @ £20.50 ex. VAT, 1litre @ £40 ex. VAT). In light of anticipated Iodine shortages, we are also looking to stock Vetericyn Super 7 (£23.11 ex. VAT) as an Iodine alternative

Colostrum

We can take bloods from baby lambs (2-7 days old) to assess colostral transfer. This is worth doing right at the start of lambing, so that adjustments can be made should any deficiencies be detected. Lab cost per sample is £4.29, plus visit and sampling charge. It is usually recommended to sample 10 lambs.

To help facilitate quick and easy collection of your own ewes' colostrum, we are able to supply "Udderly EZ" harvesting equipment (£125 ex. VAT). We are also able to supply Immucol colostrum supplement at a £57.77 (zero vat) for up to 40 feeds. This differs from most products as it contains high levels of immunity as well as energy, meaning the cost is greatly outweighed by the benefits!

Trace Elements

As most concentrate feeds are well supplemented with trace elements, we usually recommend that ewes have not received any supplement for at least two months prior to sampling. Sampling around 2 months pre-tupping is ideal, as this means any deficiencies can be addressed before the next cycle begins. Sampling is beneficial as an excess can be just as detrimental as a deficiency, and if a true deficiency exists then boluses or injections can be a more reliable method of supplementation - intakes from buckets can be hit and miss.

Sampling at least 5 ewes (and lambs) is recommended. Cost per sample is £19.48, plus visit and sampling charge.

Ewe nutrition planning

We can interpret your forage analysis results and create a ewe feeding plan.

We can also assess your shed layout, as what you feed is only as good as the number of ewes that can access it!

Alternatively - or additionally - ewe bloods can be taken 2-3 weeks pre-lambing to check that energy and protein intakes are sufficient.

It is recommended to take samples from 5 ewes from each feeding group. Lab cost is £11.28 per sample, plus visit and sampling charge.

Abortion / Barren Ewe sampling

We are hopeful that MSD will again cover the laboratory costs of screening for exposure to two common causes for abortion in ewes, Toxoplasmosis and Enzootic Abortion. These are worth identifying as vaccines are available. Talk to us about sampling empty and aborting ewes BEFORE they go as culls!

Clostridial Vaccination

We can order various Clostridial/Pasteurella vaccines for your flock. Ewes should receive a booster 4-6 weeks pre-lambing: if there is a wide spread of lambing, consider administering boosters in two batches, delaying the dose for ewes lambing later in the season. Previously unvaccinated ewes will need a priming dose around a month before the booster.



**They are frustrating, they are expensive, and they are time consuming!
Pneumonia and scour in calves.**

The temptation is to just reach for the solution in a bottle and the syringe and needle. But – wouldn't it be better to invest in health than just pay for disease?

Often, especially with pneumonia the cases you see are the tip of the iceberg. The rest of the group are affected less obviously, but still costing you money! Studies indicate that when 30% are 'affected' a further 40% will have lung damage. So apart from the obvious costs of medicines or even death, there is a huge hidden cost where growing animals take several weeks or months more to achieve target weights for sale or breeding.

The same is true for many causes of calve scour, where those less obviously affected will still have reduced growth rates. Your eye (and syringe) will inevitably only be drawn to the sickest. Historically, it was often frustrating to achieve diagnosis, with significant time lapses between sampling and diagnosis. Thankfully technology has moved on.



For pneumonia we can take throat swabs from affected calves which are sampled using PCR technology. These are sent to the laboratory and identify the presence of the full range of viral and bacterial infections present in those calves on that day. This massively aids our ability to choose the correct interventions, be it correct choice of vaccine at the correct time, or which antibiotic may be most appropriate.

Similarly, we now have scour sample kits which are used on farm, 'calve side' to identify the potential causes of scour in calves up to 1 month old. Again, this can immediately offer insight into potential preventative measures. Samples for coccidiosis and worms in older calves will still need to be sent to our outside laboratory but usually return an answer within 1 working day.

So, please don't just accept these diseases as inevitable. As soon as problems arise, call us. We aim to attend and diagnose as quickly as possible with the intention of creating a plan to reduce problems, not just provide treatments!

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