

Hello and welcome to the March Newsletter – for those of you who haven't been washed away! February was not a lot of fun weather wise – wet, wet and more wet, with a bit of cold thrown in for fun at the end. On top of that, we have all been trying to get our heads around the Sustainable Farming Scheme – a banned topic in our house!! So let's hope March arrives with some sunshine and better news!

Lambing has started with a bang. We are seeing a real mixed bag – your scanning results were mixed with more than usual barren and more than usual triplets! If you need help with nutrition, flock health etc, please ring.

Thank you to the many of you who dropped wellies with us – they will put in an appearance at the Senedd next week.

Our newest recruit Sarah is doing this month's articles – a recap on the dairy cow transition meeting held early in February and as positive a look at Schmallenberg as possible – we're looking for your help filling in a survey to try to gather information and understand the disease a bit more. She has been finding her feet in the area since November and has been receiving a warm welcome, thank you.

For any of you needing a medicine book template, we can now email one to you – along with our straightforward Herd or Flock health plan.

Mary

### Suffered with Schmallenberg?

Sadly, we've come across some heavy losses from Schmallenberg deformed lambs in early lambing flocks so far this year, and one calf case so far too. Although we know that the virus is spread by midges, and causes disruption to the early development of foetuses (resulting in classic deformities such as twisted spines, fixed joints, rounded skulls, undershot jaws) – there is still a lot that is unknown. You may remember previous surges of Schmallenberg cases in 2013 and 2017, and it seems that this disease has a 3-4 year cyclical pattern. There's no suitable vaccine at present and it's easy to sympathise with you as farmers feeling powerless and demoralised at losing large proportions of lamb crops (up to 25% in the worst-affected UK flocks) without being able to take positive action to prevent it. All is not lost though, as there are a few small steps you can take to help get a grip of this disease:

- Take advantage of the free testing offered by APHA (brain samples from lambs/calves)
- You don't necessarily need to cull ewes that have had Schmallenberg lambs this year; they should have immunity for future years
- If it's an option to lamb/calve later in the Spring, you might dodge the worst of the midge season (especially if Autumn brings warm, wet weather)
- Keep up your fly control products later into the year, as these may help to repel midges too
- Complete this survey run by the University of Nottingham to help researchers map patterns and make progress in understanding and tackling Schmallenberg <https://bitly.we/3cDCd>

Continued PTO

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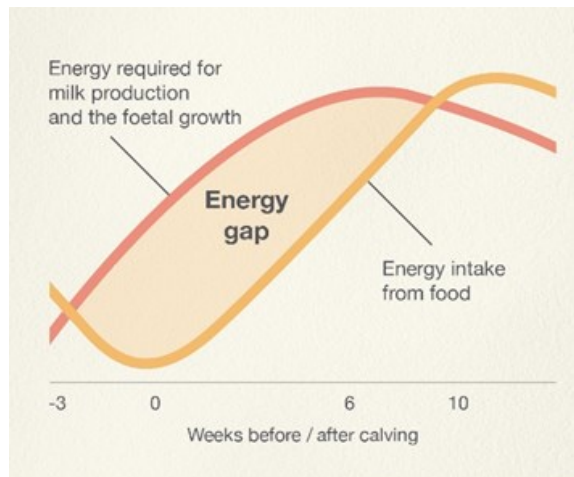
## Top Transition Tips

It was great to see such good attendance at our recent dairy meeting, focusing on the transition period and ketosis. Thank you to Elanco for their sponsorship, and Russ for speaking. Here is a summary of the take-home messages to catch up those that couldn't attend, or revision if you weren't paying attention!

The transition period starts at drying off and ends once the cow is safely one month into her next lactation. Managing this time carefully is key for avoiding the majority of problems you're likely to see in a dairy cow's entire production cycle. As you will no doubt be well aware, around 75% of all adult cow health problems arise during the early lactation section. Most of these boil down to negative energy balance, or clinical/subclinical ketosis – the cow simply cannot eat enough to meet the energy needs of late-term pregnancy and the sudden and increasing demands of milk production. You'll see this manifest as:

- Milk fever
- Retained cleansing
- Metritis and endometritis
- Mastitis
- Displaced abomasums
- Increased lameness
- Reduced milk yield (358kg/lactation in cows; 500kg in heifers)
- Reduced fertility (subclinically ketotic animals are 50% less likely to conceive to first AI)

Image courtesy of Elanco



The key for reducing your chances of getting knocked by these losses is good nutritional management during the dry period. This is a lot easier to get right if cows are dried off in the right condition. Aim for BCS 2.5-3 at dry-off, then to stay steady without any weight gain or loss during the far-off dry period. In that critical 3 weeks prior to calving, the main aim is maximising feed intakes:

- Avoid overcrowding (1m<sup>2</sup> lying space per 1000L yield per cow; i.e. 9m<sup>2</sup> for 9,000L cow)
- Comfortable lying space to encourage rumination
- Low stress (keep group changes to a minimum, move cows in pairs if possible)
- Fresh feed available ad lib, 24/7
- Easily accessible feed faces, ideally 85cm per head
- Large clean water troughs (10cm per head)

It's also important to identify cows at higher risk of ketosis for extra support. These are easily remembered as SOFT – **S**ick, **O**ld, **F**at or **T**wins. If you have the option to give these cows a pen of their own, with more feed and lying space than others, this will help reduce their risks as well as make it easier for staff to monitor any problems that do arise. There are also boluses available which can be given as a targeted treatment to SOFT cows 3-4 weeks prior to calving. The bolus works by encouraging rumen bugs which produce proprionate, which is used by the cow to produce glucose, and this reduces negative energy balance and the risk of ketosis.



Image courtesy of Elanco



As always, please contact the practice if you are interested in some personalised transition assessment and advice to improve your herd performance in this key area and we'll be happy to help.

This month's author is Sarah Woollatt. Sarah joined us from practice in Bristol at the end of last year. Those of you who attended our transition meeting will have seen Sarah there or others of you will have bumped into her on farm.

On another note, as many of you ask, Jimmy hasn't finished working with us, you may see him helping us out on a few busy days through the spring.

## Office opening hours

Monday – Friday (Except Bank Holidays)

8.30am - 5.30pm

## Emergency out of hours service

Weeknights 5.30pm - 8.30am

Saturday & Sunday all day