

Hello and welcome to the May Newsletter – we've definitely had a drier month at last. I hope you are starting to catch up a bit. There are going to be some lasting effects of the odd weather. We have already seen *Nematodirus* this year in lambs. Don't forget we offer a faecal egg counting service for you to check if you need to worm or not.

The post movement TB testing has started now – remember that if you are in an intermediate risk area (most of the practice area except CPH numbers starting 60) and purchase any age animal from a high risk area, it will need a post movement TB test 60-120 days after its arrival on your holding. These animals cannot be moved off the premises, except to abattoir until the test is completed. APHA are 'aiming' to send letters to farmers to confirm this in each instance, as it is not always obvious when buying if an animal is coming from a high risk area. However, the responsibility lies with you the farmer and I suspect a penalty if you do not test. The following link will get you to the map that shows the demarcation for the different risk areas

<https://www.gov.wales/wales-tb-regionalisation-map#78354>

The swallows are back – so let's hope summer will follow. Fingers crossed for a productive May.

Mary

Growing lambs

Russell discussed feeding the milking ewe to maximise lamb growth last month.

In the first 6 weeks, lamb growth is largely dependent on milk supply from the ewe. At 6 weeks old, lambs will only get around a third of their energy from grazing, whilst by 12 weeks virtually all their nutrition will come from grass. During this time they must adapt from using a single stomach digesting milk to developing a functioning rumen to utilise grass effectively.

So what can we do to encourage an efficient transition and maximise lamb growth from grass?

Managing grazing

Managing grazing to get the most out of grass has been discussed in previous newsletters (See April 2022 on our website [apr22.pdf \(southwalesfarmvets.co.uk\)](#)) so we will only cover it briefly here. Grass growth will vary widely depending on weather conditions, growing lambs should be prioritised for the best grass. If grass becomes short before weaning, ewes and lambs will compete for the available forage, which may necessitate early weaning.

Target sward heights vary by species. For sheep, begin grazing with 8-10cm cover, and then move to the next field when residuals are down to around 5cm. For finishing lambs in the autumn, these figures should be increased by 2cm. Rotational grazing rather than set stocking improves grass utilisation (less waste), grass quality (less dead leaves so more energy) and

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grass quantity (fields can be rested and allowed to recover) while having the added benefit of helping with parasite control as lambs can be moved onto “clean” pasture.

Parasites

When lambs start grazing they can also inadvertently pick up parasites from the environment. The actual parasites involved will depend on the farm, lamb age, time of year and the weather conditions.

Coccidiosis and *Nematodirus battus* can both affect young lambs, from 4 weeks old. Both parasites cause diarrhoea, weight loss and in severe cases death. Their appearance can be indistinguishable in the affected animal (occasionally both can occur together) and a diagnosis will require faecal samples.

If not dealt with promptly and effectively both can have a long term negative impact on growth rates. A good knowledge of farm history is important as both parasites can survive for long periods on fields, readily overwintering, and so infect successive lamb crops on the same pastures.

The risk period for *Nematodirus* can be predicted based on the average day/night temperature for an area meaning forecasting tools can be utilised. SCOPS provides a map of the risk forecast on the following site www.scops.org.uk/forecasts/nematodirus-forecast/.



As the season progresses “normal” gut worms become a risk, depending on pasture management and contamination levels. Lamb growth rates +/- faecal egg counts should be monitored to determine the need for treatment. Waiting until lambs have a dirty bum is too late as growth will already have been compromised.

Trace elements

Requirements for trace elements are often higher in the growing animal. In our practice area the trace element deficiencies we most commonly see in lambs are cobalt and selenium.

Cobalt: crucial for metabolism and energy supply (growth) and is essential when developing a functioning rumen. Signs of cobalt deficiency include lethargy, reduced appetite, poor quality wool with an open fleece, poor doing/ill thrift and anaemia.

Supplementation can be via simple drench, long acting vitamin B12 injection or rumen boluses. Drenches will only last 3-4 weeks so require regular dosing while vitamin B12 injections last approximately 2 months. Rumen boluses require lambs to be big enough for safe application (often 15-20kg). Not all boluses are the same, different brands will have different durations of action which is often a lot shorter than claimed.

Selenium: essential in lots of enzymes important in immune response and iodine metabolism. Signs of deficiency are ill thrift, white muscle disease and reduced immune response.

Supplementation can be via drench or rumen bolus. Selenium is stored in the liver so drenching does not need to be as frequent as for cobalt.

If you have any questions about how to get the best growth out of your lambs, please ring the practice, we are happy to help.

This month’s author was Sian Fuller



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