

It's November already! Where has this strange year gone? We hope everyone is keeping safe during this pandemic and our best wishes go out to those who have succumbed to COVID. Autumn is starting to give way to winter and most cattle will be inside shortly. In this month's newsletter, we've something new—a sheep worm you probably haven't heard of; a couple of older diseases in cattle that just don't go away—Leptospirosis and Digital Dermatitis; two more Zoom meetings coming up this month; and don't miss our last page for new additions to the practice, Heather's family and the moving on of a longstanding colleague.

**Mark Stott**

## Here We Go Again.....

Guidance on worming sheep evolves over time and just as farmers are catching up, things seem to change. Over the last few years, we have encouraged farmers to worm adult ewes less. Generally, they only need treating at lambing time, and even then, perhaps not all of them. Ewes have good immunity to most worms most of the year, however.....

There is a worm called **Haemonchus contortus**. It typically likes warmer climates but is now seen in Northern England and Scotland, and has recently been diagnosed in the north of the practice. It is unusual as adult sheep have poor immunity to it, so they can be affected as badly as lambs. It causes blood and weight loss rather than scour, so a diagnosis of worms might not be obvious, and can be confused with liver fluke, poor nutrition, deficiencies etc. It should be a consideration where ewes are thinner than expected.

Worm egg counts are of value in thin sheep, with *Haemonchus* typically giving very high values. The picture is complicated by the fact that ewes that are lean for another reason will have lowered immunity and can have higher worm egg counts as a secondary finding. A bit of detective work is needed to decide if *Haemonchus* is the primary problem, or if high worm burdens are a secondary symptom of other flock problems. We must also avoid falling into the trap of worming more often without proper justification as resistance to treatments is on the rise.

In summary, fit adult ewes don't need worming other than at lambing time. In thin ewes, worm egg counts are of value and *Haemonchus* needs to be considered as a primary underlying cause, even in the absence of scour.

**Sarah Harker**



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## **Focus on Leptospirosis**

Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection, which as well as infecting cattle and sheep, also infects humans. In last months practice bulk milk survey **72%** of herds tested positive, telling us that this disease is ever present in our area.

**Infected urine** is the main source of infection, however, the bacteria can also be found in semen, vaginal excretions and the placenta of infected animals. Risk factors include:

- Buying in animals
- Sharing/hiring bulls
- Co-grazing with sheep
- Access to stagnant water and using streams/streams as a water source



**Uninfected herds** can suffer abortion storms, fever, a dramatic milk drop, mastitis like changes to milk and a flaccid udder (known as “flabby bag”). However, most herds are infected at low rumbling levels and clinical signs are less obvious, presenting as infertility and occasional abortions, still births and weak calves.

### **How do you know if your herd is infected?**

Bulk milk testing in non-vaccinated herds can check antibody levels, which if positive, would indicate previous exposure, and a need to start a control programme. Beef animals can be blood tested to check for antibody levels.

### **Prevention**



Vaccination in an infected herd will reduce shedding of bacteria from infected cows and help improve herd fertility (when infertility is caused by Lepto). Animals vaccinated after being exposed to infection can still continue to shed (although in less numbers), therefore it is important to vaccinate heifers before being exposed to the bacteria. The vaccine protocol should be started in heifers prior to first service, and as a gold standard, before first turnout.

In uninfected herds, vaccination should also be considered because if the herd becomes infected, the results can be severe. If not vaccinating, strict biosecurity measures should be in place, and regular bulk milk monitoring should be carried out to monitor introduction of the disease into the herd.

Remember also, the disease can be caught by people, so if you have it on your farm you should vaccinate to protect yourself and staff.

Vaccination entails a starting course 2 injections, 4 weeks apart followed by an annual booster. Its relatively cheap so it is a cost effective way of improving herd fertility, protecting your herd and you!

**Becky Inman**

## Digital Dermatitis

As we move into winter digital dermatitis (DD) starts to raise its heads in dairy herds and sheep flocks. In sheep we see more and more of it in the autumn especially in lambs that are moved onto dairy farms for wintering. As the lambs have never seen DD before it can affect them badly.

DD affects animals at the skin/hoof junction so that is why in cattle you see it at the heel and sheep you see it at the top of the hoof.

Cleaning off lesions and spraying with oxytetracycline spray is the best treatment but it needs to be done for 5 days. If the cow's foot is swollen or the sheep is very lame then you will need to give antibiotics and pain relief as well.

DD is caused by a number of bugs and is highly contagious. It lives on the feet of cows and sheep and can also live in slurry. It has been shown to spread between animals on hoof knives and gloves so please clean equipment after treating animals with DD.

Prevention is the best cure for this condition and involves regular foot bathing and keeping passageways clear of slurry. Slurry irritates the heels of the cattle and allows the DD bugs to get in. The same thing happens in sheep when the conditions get wet and trashy.

Regular foot-bathing is the key to successful DD control. Herds that foot bath daily in a 3% formalin solution have the lowest levels of DD in herds. Herds that only start to foot bath when levels of DD increase, struggle to get on top of it. Starting early will keep DD levels low. For year round housed herds you need to footbath them all the time. Formalin is a good control method but it will irritate active DD lesions and make the cows with lesions worse.

In lambs foot bathing should be done weekly in flocks that have problems. Affected animals should be put in a separate group to be treated and to stop them spreading it to others.

There has been talk over the past few years of formalin being banned as it is not the nicest of products to handle. This has not happened yet and I hope it does not as there are very few alternatives to formalin. Copper sulphate at 10% concentration can be used but it is expensive and you do not want your sheep to go near it!!! There are some organic acid products which are an alternative as well.

**Jim McKinstry**



## Dates for your diary

**Tuesday November 10th 2020 1pm** - due to further demand we are running another online. **BVD Stamp It Out** scheme sign up meeting with Mark.



**Thursday 19th November 2020 7.30pm** - **Sheep Club Online Discussion Group**—"What's going on with thin sheep". This is for members of the sheep club only, if you are interested in hearing more about what the sheep club involves you are more than welcome to attend. To register for either meeting please e mail [linda@farmgatevets.com](mailto:linda@farmgatevets.com) or phone the practice.

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## Congratulations to Heather and Sam

Its great to share some lovely news, our Vet Heather and husband Sam welcomed baby Alice Margaret Millward into the world on the 23rd Sept 2020, weighing 8lb 1oz. All doing very well and good to see Alice's love of cows has started already!



## A warm welcome to our new vet Finbarr



Originally from West Cork in Ireland, Finbarr graduated in 2012 from the University of Liverpool. After graduating he worked as a mixed vet in Cumbria for 5 years before joining Elanco animal health focusing on Transition cow management with a brief spell working on small animal pain and parasitology.

He joined Farmgate in September 2020 and is mainly based at the Lancaster office. Clinically Finbarr has an interest in the impact of disease control and management on farm economics and welfare. He is currently studying towards a post graduate certificate in production animal medicine. Outside of work Finbarr lives with his wife Steph (also a vet and from the area) 2 working springers and 2 cats. His hobbies revolve around food, and is happiest catching, cooking and eating all sorts, better still if doing it while enjoying the great outdoors.

## Farewell and good luck to Andrew

Andrew left us in early October to move to pastures new. He has been an outstanding asset to the practice over the last 7 years and we along with many clients wish to thank him and wish him and his family all the best for the future.



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