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Practice News

The rainfall in August has seen a welcome flush of grass which has eased the plight of many. However, as we enter September it is likely that the magnesium content of the pasture will be low, particularly where there is unused fertilizer in the ground. The risk of grass staggers may well be higher this year and the usual precautions are advised.

The incidence of summer mastitis is higher this year and we have recently encountered a number of lungworm outbreaks. Cattle at grass with a soft cough should be investigated or treated promptly as delay can transform a minor problem into a disaster.

Bull issues continue to perplex with a number of insurance claims ongoing. Several farmers have been disappointed to learn that what appear to be genuine claims are not covered by their policies.

On a more positive note we have seen very few liver fluke problems over the summer. The dry period has adversely affected the habitat of the mud snail required for the fluke to complete its life cycle meaning that pasture challenge is much reduced. Strategic dosing is however still advised to maintain the health of livestock and reduce egg output.

New Johne's Disease Test

In addition to the existing Blood (Elisa) and dung tests for Johne's Disease there is now a new test available. The test has been developed from work done in diagnosing Tuberculosis in people which is caused by a very similar mycobacteria.

The new test, which can be carried out on an appropriate blood sample is believed to be more sensitive than the existing ones and is highly specific. This means that a false positive is very unlikely.

To date this technology has not been adopted by the health schemes and remains expensive at a herd level. However, for herds nearing the end of an eradication programme or herds with no disease wanting to purchase an animal it may be very useful. For further information please contact the surgery.

Contact Us

Kirriemuir

20 Forfar Road
Kirriemuir
DD8 5BY
01575 572643

Blairgowrie

Back Brae
Blairgowrie
PH10 6NW
01250 871010

vets@thrumsvet.co.uk

www.thrumsvet.co.uk

Or find us on
Facebook!



Emailing list: if you would like to receive this newsletter by email please send an email FAO Ed to vets@thrumsvet.co.uk



BVD Update

The campaign against the disease continues with all 8800 Scottish breeding herds now having a status. More than 20% are now accredited through a health scheme, surpassing the requirements from government. Locally the main risk is from purchased animals although one outbreak remains unexplained. South of the border is however a different issue with BVD still prevalent. Any cattle purchased from outside of Scotland must now be individually sampled on arrival and movements from a not negative farm within Scotland are not permitted unless pre-movement tested. With autumn sales around the corner please ensure your status does not lapse.

Semen Sampling Tups: A cost/benefit analysis

1 in 6 tups are subfertile. That's national statistic that is very much consistent with our own experiences. Often the effects of working subfertile tups goes unnoticed due to running multi-sire mobs or a low tup:ewe ratio. However, we believe that by identifying and removing these tups by semen sampling, significant costs can be saved, as demonstrated in the example below.

In this example, imagine a flock of 500 ewes, running 15 tups, over the last few years they average a scanning of 170% with a 5% barren rate.

Cost of semen sampling all tups: £360

2 subfertile tups are identified and removed, as such there is a modest 1.5% reduction in their barren rate. Accepting a 15% lamb mortality rate, this means there are 11 more lambs on the ground at the point of sale, which equates to an extra £880 in the bank.

As such there is a **net profit of £520** by simply semen sampling all tups.

In addition, your tup replacement costs are likely to significantly reduce. If not semen sampling, you may run with "ram power" of 1:30, just to be safe. Semen sampling tups will give you the confidence to run a much higher ratio, maybe 1:60 or even higher under certain circumstances.

If the above flock of 500 ewes runs 15 tups to achieve a 1:30 ratio, they will likely have to replace 3-4 tups/year at a cost of £1200-£2000. If, by semen sampling, they can increase their ratio to 1:60 they may only have to replace 2 tups/year at a cost of £800-£1000, **potentially saving up to £1200/year on replacement costs.**

In the above example, this flock **could save up to £1500** by simply performing a full fertility analysis on all their tups. Can you afford not to semen sample your tups this year?