Farm Services Newsletter Winter 2021

Moo-ving into 2021 with a focus on mobility

For a long time it felt to many vets and farmers alike that lameness was a battle that was going the wrong way but the trend seems to be changing across our client base, certainly more of the farmers we work with are achieving extremely strong results in terms of mobility score.

We are all aware that the general focus on the need for good mobility in our dairy cows is only increasing from retailers and processors and recent benchmarking figures remind us that excellent results really are being achieved by an increasing number of our clients (*see right*)

Focussing on cow comfort and properly appraising environmental risk factors are both really important aspects of achieving low lameness rates in any herd. In the future environmental technologies and improved genetic resilience will almost certainly help us make further advances in lameness control but certain fundamentals remain for the foreseeable future. Concrete floors fundamentally challenge cows' feet due to the forces that are generated as the cow moves. Some damage is therefore almost inevitable. The claw horn problems that predominate (sole ulcer, wall ulcer and most white line abscesses) are all caused by these adverse forces. The nature of these problems is such that anything other than great treatment the very first time, results in a chronic case and it is generally the accumulation of these cows that leaves a herd with a disappointing mobility score.

Many farms who don't have good mobility aren't necessarily getting a high rate of new lameness cases but the gradual impact of persistently lame cows has, to some degree, overwhelmed them.

What does a great footcare plan look like?

Well – it should be tailored to the herd but will include some degree of functional trimming and perhaps most importantly a system that genuinely results in early detection followed by prompt and effective treatment. It is fair to say that in many cases we are over trimming sound cows and under trimming lame cows.

It seems like a good moment to welcome Dom Fox into the foot trimming team. Dom, Ed and Dave all provide a great service to our clients and in some cases we are able to integrate their trimming with cost effective vet assessment and intervention to really bottom our problem cases and break the viscous cycle.

We all get preoccupied with the day to day challenges but we would encourage you to ask yourself the following:

- How good are the trimming skills in my team?
- Am I really confident of what a good job looks like and what I want to see delivered?
- Do I have a meaningful way to measure how I'm getting on?
- If there are no realistic improvements I can make to the environment, could I make progress by reviewing my footcare?

Don't forget a number of the team are on the official register of mobility scorers (RoMS). Regular mobility scoring helps massively with the early detection of lameness. It allows us to monitor ongoing lameness prevalence, assess seasonal trends as well as the impact of any management changes that are made. Having a mobility scoring plan also ticks the box for red tractor which requires you to have a mobility scoring protocol in place.

BISHOPTON VETERINARY GROUP

Check out our Facebook page @bishopton_farm_team

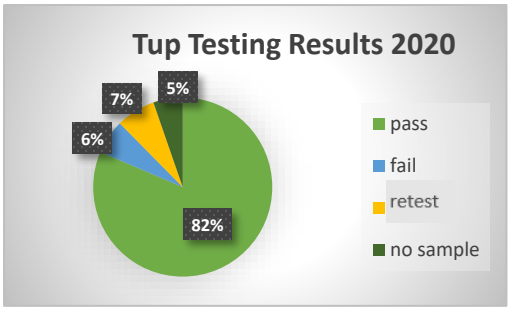
Tup testing 2020 – we had a ball!

A number of our vets had a busy tup testing season in 2020. Here vet Leanne summarises her findings.

Our involvement in flock health has grown greatly over the years, as sheep farming margins become tighter a pro active approach has become more vital. Any monitoring or actions we implement are to benefit the following season. I have learnt over the years that the key with sheep is to always be one step ahead. Tup pre breeding examinations are key example of this.

There is a long wait between turning the tups out and scanning, pre breeding examination of the tups acts as a guide for planning their tupping groups but will also highlight any tups that may have poor performance.

This year I performed 110 pre breeding examinations on tups for routine monitoring rather than to investigate a suspected problem. Of the tups tested 82% were deemed as suitable for breeding, 7% had a retest recommended (most commonly because of subfertility) and 6% were deemed as unsuitable for breeding. 5% of tups tested did not produce a semen sample for analysis. Testing provided farmers with confidence going in to the breeding season that they had adequate tup power.



What does a tup prebreeding examination involve? The prebreeding examination involves a full physical examination of the tup including a thorough inspection of the genitals and measurement of the testicles. We then collect a semen sample. Our collection method involves an electroejaculator. This device is a probe that is inserted into the rectum and positioned against the prostate. Using increasing frequency and amplitude of energy, ejaculation is stimulated. The first part of a the semen analysis is carried out on the farm to assess the movement (motility) of the sperm cells under a microscope. A sample of semen is then fixed on a slide and the anatomy (morphology) of the sperm are analysed using higher magnification using a different microscope .

Given the high volume of testing over a short period of time, this year I took the microscope home with me and had it set up on our dining table. The children were very inquisitive about what I was doing at the table, so I had to come up with an explanation suitable for a 5 and 7 year old. Luckily, we had grown lots of things from seeds over lockdown so I used the following analogy: I was looking at sheep seeds! I was checking that the seeds the daddy sheep gives to the mummy sheep would be good enough for her to grow a baby lamb for next spring. The children were very disappointed they could not plant them to grow lambs in the garden!

When the semen analysis is complete, we are then able to decide whether or a not a tup is suitable for breeding. If a tup is deemed sub fertile, this does not always mean the end of his career, he may improve with time. However, it does allow you to make an informed decision on how to use him without expecting too much for that year. Remember if you're a member of our flock health scheme you get one free tup test per year. We are able to come to your farm or you can bring them to our annual tup testing day held at Sunley Raynes.

Heptavac-P plus booster

The time of year has come round again to start thinking about vaccinating against diseases such as clostridia and pasteurella. If your ewes are in the Heptavac P plus cycle, a booster should be administered to your ewes 4-6 weeks before lambing. This will provide early protection for lambs. We have POM-VPS products like Heptavac P plus available at competitive prices and in stock at all branches. Speak to our trained SQP Philip Bowes (07860 662165) or a vet to plan your vaccinations.

BISHOPTON VETERINARY GROUP

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Winter calf health

With winter upon us, you've hopefully given a little thought to caring for your calves in the cold weather. Unlike their older herd companions, calves generate far less body heat and therefore are much more susceptible to the cold. Cold stress is seen when temperatures drop below 15°C for calves under 3 weeks or below 10°C for older calves. When cold, calves divert energy from growing and thriving to keeping warm. With careful management and some extra TLC; growth, immunity and calf health can continue unimpeded throughout winter.

Increase calories: More milk- increased volume per feed, additional feeds or more milk powder. Take care if feeding over 160g/L of milk replacer as it may lead to nutritional scours. More fat- whole milk typically contains 18% more energy than the average milk powder. Feeding a milk replacer with a higher fat content will provide more energy without having to feed a lot of extra litres. Have a look at the label and aim for 18% Fat/Oil content. More cake: calves with higher starter intake by 3 weeks are more resilient to cold weather.

Insulate: Provide shelter, wind-chill and rain exacerbate cold stress so keep calves out of the elements. Test your housing by getting down at calf level and checking for draughts. Your calves will let you know when they are cold. Are they are all huddled up? Shivering? Is there a particular area that they avoid?
Jackets: When you're thinking about reaching for the coat and hat it's time to start putting layers on your calves! Prioritise the young (<3wo), the small and sick. Wash jacket between calves (at 60 °C) and only put them on a dry calf. Jackets are cheap and can save on feed costs. Bedding needs to be clean, dry and plentiful. Look at the drainage, airflow and ventilation to help remove damp, stale air. As well as reducing your bedding and feed costs, good ventilation will reduce pneumonia and scour rates.

Good colostrum management is absolutely vital to ensure a calf gets the best start in life. It provides the calf with antibodies against all the diseases its dam has encountered, is an excellent source of fats and proteins, contains vitamins and promotes 'good' bacteria in the digestive tract.

The **'4 Qs'** are an easy way to ensure colostrum management is tip-top on your farm!

QUANTITY – The first feed should equate to 10% of body weight, e.g. a 40kg calf requires 4L.

QUALITY - Many factors influence colostrum quality: age, length of dry period, vaccination status of the dam and udder health. Ideally, all colostrum should be tested before feeding. Two common methods used to measure the quality of the colostrum quickly on farm are the Colostrometer and the Brix Refractometer.

QUICKLY - Colostrum should be fed as soon after birth as possible! Ideally in the first two hours of life, and definitely within six hours. This should be followed up by another similar size feed within twelve hours of birth.

QUIETLY - If calves are stressed while being fed colostrum, then they won't absorb the antibodies as efficiently as those that are calm. A stressed calf will require more colostrum to achieve the same level of immunity.

What do your calves have to say? Calves aged between 2-7 days old can be blood sampled to determine if they have received adequate colostrum. Measuring the blood total protein level of calves provides an indicator for colostral antibody transfer at an individual level (identifying calves at higher risk of diseases like scour and pneumonia) and success of colostrum management at the herd level. It is a good idea to check calves regularly even when things are going well. Vet and Vet Tech support is on hand to deliver this. By archiving results over time we can monitor the success of the colostrum program on your farm.

After the success of our online discussion group meetings in 2020 look out for 2021 meeting dates soon!

Salmonella in cattle: a review

Salmonella is a highly infectious and contagious disease that can cause disease in many species including cattle, sheep and humans. In cattle, clinical disease generally manifests in youngstock as; increased pneumonia, scours and mortality. In adult cows clinical signs include; diarrhoea, high temperature, abortion and mortality. Up to 50% of adult animals infected become “chronic carriers”, intermittently shedding the bacteria in their faeces without clinical signs.

Salmonellosis is primarily transmitted in faeces, but also to a lesser extent in milk and via nasal secretions. Carrier animals typically shed bacteria during the ‘transition period’, at which time, the cow is most stressed.

Protecting the herd against the its introduction should be the first step in any Salmonella control program:

- Avoid bringing “carrier cattle” into a herd. This is very difficult as testing for Salmonellosis isn’t very sensitive i.e. only 60% of truly infected animals are detected. Buying vaccinated cattle can represent a lower risk.
- Salmonella can be spread in the faeces of vermin, particularly rodents and birds. Comprehensive pest control should therefore be employed, particularly around feed stores.
- Avoid bringing infected faeces from other farms e.g. on wellies/waterproofs, shared machinery etc.
- Disinfectant foot dips are a worthwhile consideration.

Considering measures which limit the spread of Salmonella within a herd is also vital in ensuring minimal impact:

- Stocking density and hygiene within the calving area is a critical control point, as more Salmonella bacteria is spread during this period.
- Calves suckling cows and udder faecal contamination increase the likelihood of calves acquiring infection.

Vaccination of the herd should be considered if one or more major risk factors are identified on farm. Vaccination is most effective against Salmonella Dublin, the most common strain causing disease in cattle. Some cross protection is afforded through vaccination for the other strains. Should Salmonella be suspected on-farm, identification of which strain it is, will provide clarification for the best means of control. Some subsidised testing is available should you wish to explore this. Get in touch with your vet for further advice.

RAFT Solutions Update

2021 winter training course dates

Lambing	**Wed 27th Jan & Wed 24th Feb**
Mastering Medicines	**Fri 22nd Jan (online)**
DIY AI	**Mon 1st – Wed 3rd Feb (3 days + 1 day refresher)**
Foot trimming	**March & May - dates TBC**

Call the RAFT office on 01765 645893 or email training@raftsolutions.co.uk to book a place.

Covid control safety measures in place for all courses.

Courses subject to Covid postponement will be fully refundable

Practice News

Welcome back Katie Fitzgerald!
Many of you will remember Katie 'Fitz' from when she was part of the BVG farm vet team between 2012 and 2015. We are delighted that Katie has returned, she's certainly looking forward to catching up with familiar faces as well as meeting some new ones!