

**Summer 2021**

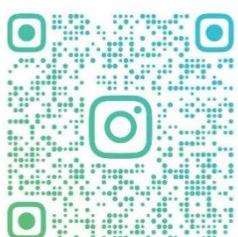


**Welcome to the new look summer edition of our newsletter!**

With a few weeks of decent weather under our belts, it is belatedly starting to feel a bit like summer, giving our vets a few chances to get caught up after a hectic spring as many of you crack on with field work. There are a few opportunities for optimism arriving with the sunshine; some slight increases in milk price which will be welcomed by all, lamb prices look set to stay strong and of course the end of covid restrictions are in sight! We can't wait for some long-anticipated catch ups, and we are looking forward to seeing you on our stand at the Great Yorkshire Show as well as the local shows circuit, where they are able to go ahead. Not forgetting our farmers barbecue which is being planned for later in the summer. Until then we will keep our fingers crossed that the weather stays kind, the route out of lockdown finally reaches its end and you and your stock stay safe and well.



*From Katie Fitzgerald  
on behalf of the  
Bishopton Farm Team*



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## Fly swatters at the ready...

After what seemed to be a never ending cold & wet spring, it is a relief to finally see the weather take a turn for the better and the sun finally make a long overdue appearance. While this brings the exciting prospect of putting away the winter jumpers and getting some silage in the clamp, it does herald the beginning of fly season!

Flies mostly feed on body secretions of cows, particularly **tears, sweat, milk and muck**. When feeding, these flies can cause severe irritation to cattle which can lead them to reduce their daily feed intakes.

### Reduced feed intakes = reduced milk production.

Unfortunately, we also see an increase in field injuries during the summer months, with cattle desperate to escape menacing flies.

There are roughly 20 species of nuisance flies or biting flies in the UK that are of significance to cattle.

Flies can be a real nuisance when milking, with agitated cows resulting in people having to run the gauntlet of wildly swishing tails and stamping feet! Therefore good fly control is important to consider for the health and safety of milking staff.

Flies are also a very good mechanical vector for spreading bacterial diseases between animals. The two most common diseases spread by flies are **Summer Mastitis** and **New Forest Eye (Pink Eye)**. These are both very contagious diseases and can cause significant issues within a herd in adult cows and heifers, with New Forest also being a real issue in youngstock. For more detailed information about each disease please speak to your herd vet.



*New Forest Eye*



*Summer Mastitis*

# Fly control cont.

An integrated approach to fly control is the best policy, including environmental management strategies, avoiding high risk areas and the topical application of fly repellents.

## ENVIRONMENT

On most farms 90% of the flies will arise from a handful of problem areas. Flies breed well in decaying organic matter especially box muck and slurry. Therefore ensuring straw yards are cleaned out frequently and that any muck removed is not kept either in the yard or close to where cattle are likely to congregate can make a real difference.

## AVOID HIGH RISK AREAS

Fields next to woods or with significant hedgerows can harbour significant fly populations therefore it is sensible to avoid grazing these fields (or ones with known fly issues) where possible in the peak fly season.

## TOPICAL ECTOPARASITICIDES

Applying a pour on fly treatment such as **SPOTINOR** can be a very useful tool in controlling the irritation caused by flies, and keep cattle more comfortable. It will also limit the number of flies landing on animals so can help reduce the risk of the spread of fly borne disease.

If you'd like more information on fly control products or some support to put together a good environmental fly control strategy, please speak to any of our farm vet team or Philip Bowes our qualified SQP.



Written by Alex Oliver  
BVetMedSci, BVM BVS



## The importance of vitamin B12 & cobalt to the growing lamb

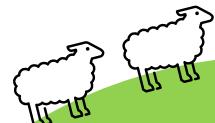
By the time this is printed, summer might finally be here and lambs will be changing their diet to include more grass, less milk. Growing lambs require increased levels of vitamin B12 to utilise energy from food and create red blood cells. Unlike people, sheep have the capability of creating their own vitamin B12 in their rumen, but it requires one crucial component, cobalt.

Sheep take in cobalt through forage, which needs to be absorbed through a healthy, functioning gut. Deficiency occurs in four ways:

1. Lack of cobalt in the pasture and therefore soil
2. Antagonistic soil elements such as iron and manganese or an alkaline soil pH
3. Damage to the lining of the gut through parasites such as coccidiosis and worms which prevent absorption of cobalt
4. The reduction in appetite as a sequel to gut parasites.

The condition “pine” is the name given to cobalt deficiency. Experienced stockmen report signs of poor wool quality, weeping eyes, pale membranes and ill thrift in cases of pine. Many deficiencies exist without any clinical signs, but poor growth rates may give an early indication.

Asking your flock vet to take blood from half a dozen lambs is an effective way of analysing immediate cobalt intake. Further veterinary investigation might involve taking liver samples from fallen stock, or abattoir sampling to give us an idea of longer term cobalt intake. I would advise doing concurrent worm egg counting when having lambs blood sampled to ensure that the deficiency isn’t purely forage based. Soil samples can be analysed although some labs may need advice to do an extra check for cobalt as it is not needed for successful plant growth.



Vitamin B12 production in the gut can be limited even in the presence of good levels of cobalt if lambs suffer bouts of acidosis from grain overload.



# Vitamin B12 & cobalt cont.

There are several treatment options listed here in order of length of action. Longer acting products may not be suitable or cost-effective in lambs which are due to be finished in the following three months. Some supplements provide vitamin B12, others provide the cobalt which the lamb then needs to process to make its own B12.

**Oral drenches.** These will provide immediate cobalt but most will pass through the gut unabsorbed, more so if the gut is already damaged by parasites. Length of action is days, not weeks.

**Short acting injection.** (Dodicile, Vitamin B12 and B1 injection) immediate action in the active form, bypasses the gut and will provide a B12 boost for up to 4 weeks.

**Smart Shot B12 injection.** (Long acting B12 injection imported from New Zealand) Expensive but six months cover.

**Cobalt boluses.** Slow release for six months, needs a functioning gut for absorption, It is important this is administered correctly to ensure lambs receive a safe dose.



*Written by Graham Tibbot  
BVSc MRCVS*

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**Training courses are back!  
Both face to face & virtually.**

Vet lead ‘Mastering Medicines’ courses are being run online and will leave you with the confidence and knowledge to responsibly administer medicine to your animals. The course also aims to increase trainees’ understanding of the legislative requirements for on farm medicine use.

**RAFT Solutions Ltd.** are also running both the Farmskills DIY AI and Foot Trimming courses face to face throughout the year, split between our new Sunley Raynes premises and practical sessions on local host farms.

If you would like more information on any of our courses, please contact the RAFT Solutions office on **01765 645893** or email [training@raftsolutions.co.uk](mailto:training@raftsolutions.co.uk)

# Futureproof your herd by minimising calving difficulties



Calving difficulties (dystocia) contribute heavily to production losses. The obvious ones are due to death at, or soon after calving, but studies from the USA have shown that calves which experience difficult births are four times more likely to be born dead or die within the first 24 hours of life compared to those born without difficulty.

The obvious losses are due to calves or cows that die at, or soon after, calving. Less noticeable losses due to calving difficulties include:

- Delayed return to heat.
- Poor conception rates and subsequent high barren cow rates and extended calving patterns.
- Labour, vet and medicine costs increase with the more problems you have.



Consider enlisting our help with measuring pelvic area in replacement heifers. Cull those that are too small.

Occasional calving problems are unavoidable. Working to minimise dystocia by careful management and selection of genetics will help to improve calf survival rates and the profitability of your herd. Many factors influence the incidence of dystocia, but broadly they can be split into two groups, detailed below.

## Factors affecting calf size and shape

- A. Calf birth weight
- B. Breed and genetics of sire
- C. Position/presentation in the uterus

## Factors affecting the ability of the cow to give birth

- A. Cow's pelvic area
- B. Age and breed of cow
- C. Nutrition and condition

# Top tips for reducing Dystocia



Mate bulling heifers and small cows to easy-calving bulls, consider the breed and use breeding values when making sire selection decisions.

Consider a role for sexed semen if practising Artificial Insemination (AI). Female calves are lighter on average than males.

Aim to calve heifers at 85% of their expected mature bodyweight.

Monitor body condition score (BCS) and target calving cows to be in BCS 2.5 - 3.0 at calving. Aim to lose no more than 0.5 BCS throughout the production cycle.

Do not try to limit feed prior to calving as it will limit cow nutrition and can actually increase calving problems as underfed cows will struggle to progress through a normal calving.

Consider carefully whether daughters of cows that have suffered dystocia should be kept as replacement animals.

In a beef setting aim to calve heifers 21-30 days prior to the planned start of calving adult cows. It will allow more observation of heifers and allow them time to resume cycling prior to bulling.

Keep a record of calving ease for calves you observe born. If this changes over time consider reasons for this.

When assisting cows at calving, provide adequate time for a cow or heifer to calve prior to interfering. Do not rush in. Assistance levels should be less than 5% for cows and less than 15% for heifers.

House assisted beef calves for a few days post calving. Studies have shown that this improves their chance of survival rather than being left outdoors in the immediate period post calving.

Written by Neil Eastham  
BVSc DBR NSch MRCVS



# Teaser Tup Preparation

Do you want to tighten up your lambing period? Are you fed up with lambing for months on end? The use of a teaser tup could help with this as using one to synchronise your flock's oestrous cycle will shorten the resulting lambing period. The lambs will likely come thick and fast so you will need to be prepared!

## What is a teaser?

A teaser is a tup that has had removal of a portion of the vessel that carries the semen (a vasectomy). This operation is done under light sedation and local anaesthetic at the practice. The tup will be infertile but still have testosterone as he will still have both testicles. This means they will still bring ewes in to heat and have the libido to tup, but will not get the ewes pregnant. You will need 2 teasers per 100 ewes.

## Tup Testing

Our ram pre-breeding evaluation (RPBE) includes a full physical examination of your tups as well as microscopic evaluation of semen samples for motility and morphology to make sure they are up to the job. This can be done on your own farm or at our advanced breeding unit, Sunley Raynes near Ripon.

As last years Tup Testing day was such a success, we will be holding further testing days later this year for you to bring your tups to our new site and you can also meet the RAFT breeding team.

If you would like more information on this or any of our other services, please speak to your flock vet or contact the RAFT Solutions office on **01765 645893** or email [office@raftsolutions.co.uk](mailto:office@raftsolutions.co.uk)

## Introduction of the teaser

The ewe must not have had sight, sound or smell of any tup for at least 6 weeks prior to teaser introduction. The teasers are then introduced for no longer than 14 days. The fertile tups are then introduced. You will need plenty of tup power as the ewes heats will be synchronised. A ratio of one fertile tup to 25 – 30 ewes is necessary.



We now stock all major brands of sheep boluses at competitive prices to cover all requirements.



Speak to our qualified R-SQP Philip Bowes on  
**07860 662165**