XLVETSFEATURE

Shows & Events

MAY AND JUNE 2009

NSA NORTH SHEEP WEDNESDAY 3RD JUNE 2009

NSA WELSH SHEEP TUESDAY 19TH MAY 2009

XLVets member *BEN PEDLEY* of WILLOWS VETERINARY GROUP attended and presented a bluetongue seminar at the recent NSA Welsh Sheep Event 2009.

(Left) Ben Pedley

BEEF EXPO THURSDAY 21ST MAY 2009

This year's *NORTH SHEEP* event was held at Laund Farm, Preston. The event was extremely well attended and the XLVets stand enjoyed a very busy day, with over 300 VISITORS to the stand.

The XLVets stand (above) promoted farm health planning and held a competition to determine the extent of farm health planning being undertaken by those visiting the event. Of the 96 entries to the competition, 76% of entrants claimed they had a flock health plan, however only 56% of these farmers meet with their veterinary surgeon to review flock health management.

Many thanks to Iain Richards (Westmorland), Judith Lee (Westmorland), Ian Cure (Lambert, Leonard & May), Vicky Bushby (Paragon) and Lucy Hindmarsh (Paragon) who all helped on the XLVets stand at this year's North Sheep event.

Congratulations to *SIMON SIMCOCK* from Macclesfield who won the XLVets competition held on the day of the show.

The pre-Expo farm visits had been to two farm clients of XLVets member BELMONT VETERINARY CENTRE and we had over 400 farmers attend the XLVets stand on the day of the show.

A very big thank you to Anne (Paragon), Bill (Belmont), James (LLM), Helen (Wright and Morten), Jo (Scott Mitchell) and David (Paragon) for their sterling efforts at this year's Beef Expo held at the Three Counties Showground in Malvern in May (Right).

Congratulations to *MARTIN DAVIES* who farms at Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire, who won the XLVets competition held on the day of the show.

For more information on forthcoming events please see our website; www.xlvets.co.uk

XLVets next event:
DAIRY EVENT & LIVESTOCK SHOW
16 - 17TH SEPTEMBER 2009
STONELEIGH

XLVETS - EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE www.xlvets.co.uk ISSUE 6

FARMING review

SEPTEMBER 2009

FERTILITY MANAGEMENT

SHEEP FLOCK PLANNING

Concerns for poor lamb body condition and lower than expected live weight in offspring.

xlvets Excellence in Practice

FARMER SOLUTIONS

WHY WE NEED A NEW MASTITIS CONTROL PLAN...

NEW Mastitis CONTROL PLAN D.

DairyCo has launched a new evidence based, farm specific Mastitis Control Plan this summer. The Plan is the result of years of work and investigation into the depth and range of the mastitis challenges facing British dairy producers and will provide individual, situation specific solutions to help farmers tackle them head on.

The Five Point Plan and other mastitis control strategies have led to a reduction in both incidences and prevalence of clinical and sub-clinical mastitis in the UK since the late 1960s. But recent years have seen bulk milk somatic cell counts remaining at or around 200,000 cells/ml and there is strong evidence that clinical mastitis has been rising. The rate is currently estimated at between 50 and 70 cases per 100 cows per year.

The past two decades have also seen a change in the aetiology of bovine mastitis, with a dramatic shift away from the classic contagious mastitis pathogens towards those of primary environmental aetiology.

'The average cost of a clinical case of mastitis is £200 to £300,' says Kate Cross of DairyCo. 'That means mastitis costs the average 100 cow herd £12,000 a year for clinical cases alone. There will also be additional losses from sub-clinical effects such as SCC penalties, yield loss and secondary health effects. Mastitis continues to cost the industry millions of pounds each year and creates real animal welfare issues.'

'This recent rise in incidence rates, coupled with an apparent change in behaviour of some pathogens (such as *Streptococcus uberis*) means that controlling bovine mastitis has become an increasing challenge for both the dairy farmer and veterinary practitioner,' she explains.

'There was no national strategy and evidence based plan for mastitis control and as a result, DairyCo developed the Mastitis Control Plan in conjunction with the University of Nottingham and Quality Milk Management Services Ltd.'

How the Plan works

The DairyCo Mastitis Control Plan is implemented by a vet or advisor, working with the farmer to collect herd data, and answer a detailed questionnaire. The results are fed into the system which then provides a bespoke, prioritised plan of action for that individual farm, which will, if followed, lead to a substantial reduction in mastitis.

'Vets and advisors will be trained to undertake a thorough investigation of herd management in order to identify the key mastitis influences on an individual farm,' Ms Cross says. 'They will gather information from all aspects of cow and farm management, for example how and where the cows are calved, the milking routine, bio-security measures and cow nutrition. They will also observe a milking and teat score all cows in the herd.'

> "There was no national strategy and evidence based plan for mastitis control and as a result, DairyCo developed the Mastitis Control Plan..."
>
> Kate Cross, DairyCo

'As part of the plan there will be analysis of the mastitis epidemiology. Strategic milk samples will be taken from clinical cases across the herd, as well as from the 10 highest cell count cows,' she adds.

All this information will give a comprehensive picture of the mastitis situation on farm, whether the unit is dealing predominantly with environmental or contagious pathogens, and where the problem mainly lies, dry cows or milking cows. The plan will then pull on its huge amount of knowledge to provide some key targeted control measures that will really hit that particular mastitis problem hard.

How to get involved

DairyCo will be running courses to train individuals in the implementation of the DairyCo Mastitis Plan.

'The training will be open to individual dairy farmers or advisors and veterinary surgeons who can implement the plan with their clients. Mastitis is a complex problem that can best be tackled with the co-operation and expertise of the farm team working together' concludes Ms Cross.

> "...if you look after the cow as a whole well, she will pay you back with a quality milk product." Graeme McPherson

Graeme McPherson is a veterinary surgeon with XLVets Larkmead Veterinary Group in Cholsey and was involved with the pilot study of the Mastitis Control plan.

'The DairyCo Mastitis Control plan is a really effective, holistic new approach to mastitis control in the UK dairy herd. It's a complete farm approach to the problem and I feel that if you look after the cow as a whole well, she will pay you back with a quality milk product.

'The project encourages vet and producer to look at areas such as feed space, grazing policy and water provision, not historically associated with mastitis control.'

'Sitting down with the questionnaire and viewing the milking routine is a useful exercise in itself. It highlights just what a huge number of factors are involved in mastitis control. But add these to the teat scoring and bacteriology samples from clinical cases and high cell count cows and you get a really comprehensive picture of what the mastitis issues are on that particular unit.'

'By providing farmers with a checklist of the areas that need attention on their specific unit, the Plan makes sure that efforts are directed in the right area. It is a list of manageable actions that are ranked by those that will have the biggest impact on their units. I really think the Plan is a great step forward, it tackles cow health as a whole with mastitis control as the target.'

Contact us...

For more information about DairyCo Mastitis Control Plan training courses please contact:

Kate Cross on 02476 478686
or email: kate.cross@dairyco.org.uk.

Farmers interested in finding out more about the plan, or in finding the nearest vet trained in using the Plan visit www.mastitiscontrolplan.co.uk.

DairyCo will also have information about the Plan available on its stand at the Dairy Event in September.

PILOT STUDY

The DairyCo Mastitis Control Plan was tested on 26 farms and the results were compared with 26 control farms, where no help was given on tackling mastitis problems. On average, among those producers who implemented the Plan, there was a drop of 22% in mastitis cases over a 12 month period. Those farmers in the test group who put the majority of the action plan in place, achieved up to a 36% reduction in mastitis cases over the same period.

Cumulative positive effects on mastitis incidences have been seen on test farms beyond the 12 months working with the DairyCo Mastitis Control Plan.

22% DROP IN MASTITIS CASES

'The Bowns have a very respectable low culling rate of 20%. So to protect this, it's important that appropriate changes are made to prepare the farm and its buildings to support having more animals, so that this low culling rate can be maintained, or even improved.' **Paddy Gordon**

Veterinary advice ensures new

CUBICLES

SET FOR THE FUTURE!

Paddy Gordon Shepton Veterinary Group
Geoff Bown Welsh Hills Bottom Farm

Somerset dairy farmers Geoff Bown and son Anthony of Welsh Hills Bottom Farm are in the process of expanding their dairy herd.

This has led, amongst other changes, to the requirement for extra housing and cubicles, and their vet Paddy Gordon of XLVets Shepton Vet Group has advised them on optimum cubicle size and design.

Paddy explains: 'The Bowns have a very respectable low culling rate of 20%. So to protect this, it's important that appropriate changes are made to prepare the farm and its buildings to support having more animals, so that this low culling rate can be maintained, or even improved.'

For the Bowns, whilst the cubicles installed back in 1991 were appropriate then, the larger cow sizes of today require more space.

'Consideration of buildings and cow management is all part of herd health planning - it's about preparing for the future, as well as working on current themes.'

In September 2008, the Bowns converted their old silage barn into a cow shed. A nearby silage clamp had also become obsolete and so the sleeper walls were taken out and 60 new cubicles were installed, to coincide with new cubicles in the lean-to. This made a total of 104 new cubicles.

Paddy and the Bowns took some time to establish optimum dimensions of the new cubicles and passageways to maximise cow comfort and minimise disease and injury. Minor modifications were also made to the existing cubicles.

Whilst it is too early to financially assess the impact of the new cubicles, it is already plain to see that cows prefer them. Anthony Bown adds: 'Cows proactively choose the new cubicles, and we notice the occupancy rate is much higher.'

Paddy adds: 'It's too early to see the improvements in cow welfare coming through in the herd performance records.'

However, the new housing should result in an even lower culling rate due to fewer forced culls, and also a lower incidence of digital dermatitis, and less aggression and consequent injury.

He does have a word of warning on adapting cubicles to improve their acceptability to cows: 'When cubicles have a higher use rate, they will also get dirty more quickly.'

'So IMPROVEMENTS to cubicle design need to be matched with an increase in attention to keeping them clean, either use more straw/sand/sawdust and an increased frequency of bedding up.'

CUBICLES FOR THE FUTURE
WELSH HILLS BOTTOM FARM

- (Left) **Picture 1** - The older cubicles were adapted by removing the front wall to increase the lunging space.
- (Left) **Picture 2** - Head rail height - The head rail should be 50" high and 7ft from the top of the curve, so as not to inhibit cows lying down.
- Brisket board - position cows to lie cleanly and reduce mastitis risk.
- (Left) **Picture 3** - Wider passageways - reduce slurry build up and so reduce digital dermatitis.
- (Left) **Picture 4** - Ideally the kerb step should be 6-7 inches high rather than 4-5 inches, so that the shed can be cleaned out without getting muck on the beds.
- Cut-through at end of cubicle run to reduce aggression.
- (Left) **Picture 5** - Anthony Bown demonstrates the new tip-over trough which makes it easier to keep the supply of drinking water clean for the cows.
- (Left) **Picture 6** - A high lying down rate is an indicator of good cow comfort.

BRITISH PIG INDUSTRY

Up until recently, not a huge amount has been said in the public arena about the industry apart from the occasional 'doom and gloom' report, or to marvel at their amazing ability to cycle up huge numbers of Foot and Mouth Disease virus particles and the consequent problems when outbreaks occur.

WELL WHAT A **CHANGE** HAS OCCURRED...

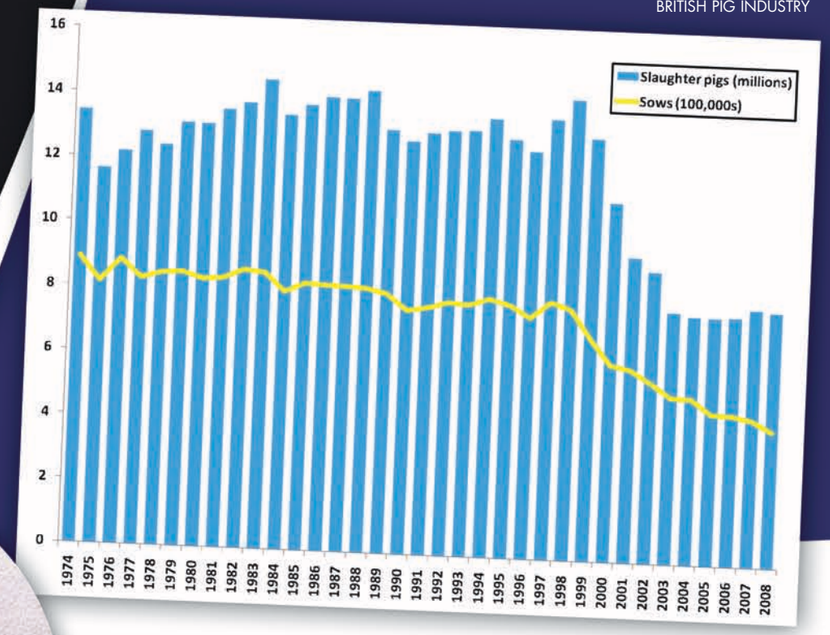
By **Duncan Berkshire** Bishopton Veterinary Group

Recently we've had Jamie Oliver expounding the vast benefits to the consumer of using different cheaper cuts of pork in this time of recession, as well as the financial and welfare advantages of sourcing British pig meat over our competitors in Europe and the rest of the World.

The advent of Porcine Circovirus 2 (PCV-2) vaccines has brought about a dramatic change in the health profile of the national herd and, coupled with the recent changes in sale price and the exchange rate, pig farmers even have something to smile about for a change.

(Right) **Figure 1** - Annual breeding sow numbers (line) and slaughter numbers (bar) for the UK herd (source BPEX)

(Below) Duncan Berkshire - Bishopton Veterinary Group



So what is actually happening within the industry? Well the decline in the national herd size appears to have slowed, and has even reversed slightly within the first quarter of this year. Increases in production within the UK have led to the number of pigs going to slaughter increasing slightly over the past 8 years, despite the contraction in the breeding herd (Figure 1). Increased slaughter weights have also led to better returns on investment as the overall tonnage of pig meat produced has gone up (704T in 2008). The rest of Europe is currently feeling a very tight squeeze on their pig industries, some likening this to that felt in the UK industry during the last decade. This has led to net margins moving into the positive over the past few months, although there are several years of negative margins to make up for before we can all sigh with relief (Figure 2). How much of an impact this has on the UK industry in the long run is difficult to predict, but certainly allows a pause for everyone to reassess what direction pig farming is moving in.

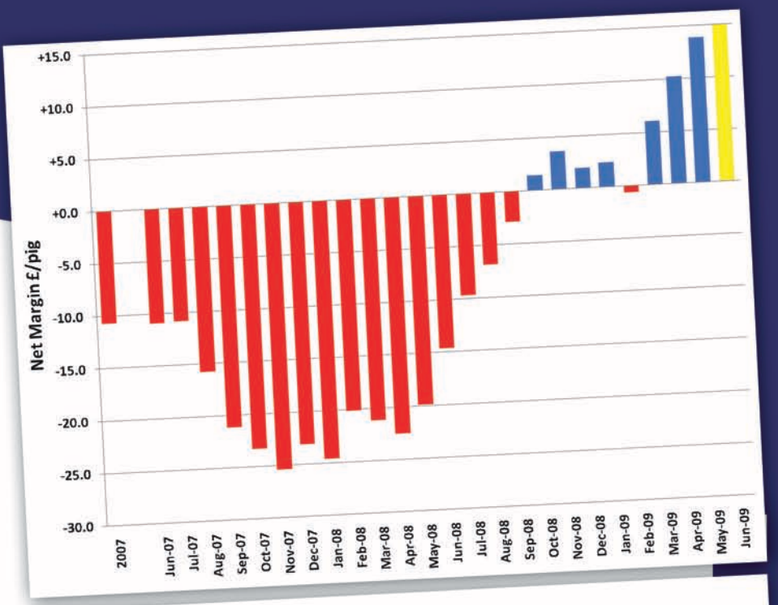
Overall health within the national herd has had a massive boost over the past 12 months as the new generation of vaccines have come through to help reduce the incidence of PCV-2 associated diseases. This has, in essence, turned everything upside down! The last couple of decades have revolved around battling with disease on farm - the introduction of new genetics, breeding patterns, all in all out, pig flow, health programmes - all have been geared towards reducing the problems seen on unit and increasing health and productivity. A revolution has been occurring and we are still relatively early on in the transition.

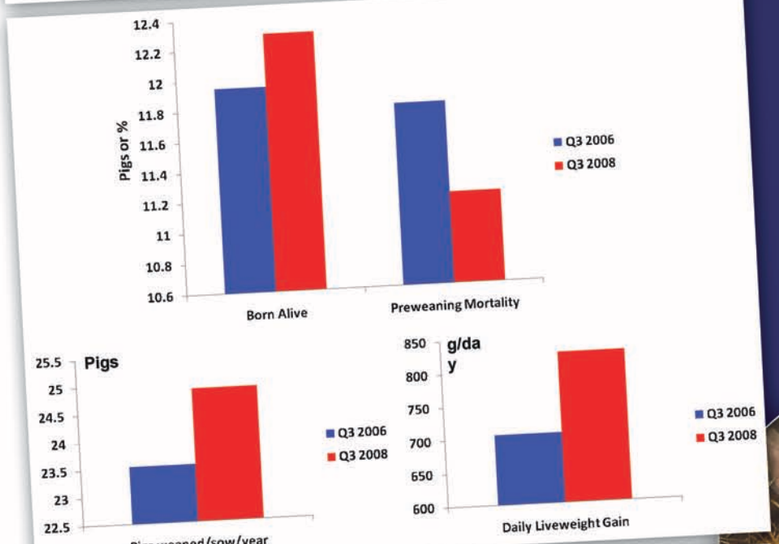
Major effects have already been seen within the feeding herd, with reductions in mortality and increases in growth seen on most farms. Despite the fact that the overall health has been raised throughout the UK, complacency should not be allowed to set in as other diseases that have been potentially hidden from view come through to the forefront. For example, recent experience within our region and clients shows an increasing incidence of Glassers Disease and Swine Dysentery diagnoses, trends that are being mirrored in other areas of the country.

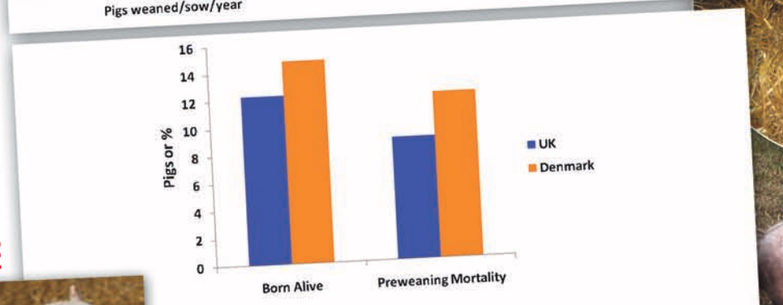
Production parameters have certainly improved over the past couple of years as genetic potential has started to be realised within the altered health status present on units (Figure 3). In the feeding herd as mentioned earlier, growth rates have improved by an enormous 17.1%. The increase in productivity of the breeding herd is also good to see, indicating that the potential has been there for some time. Comparisons to Europe are difficult to make (Figure 4) since differences in the production figures can be down to various different factors, including the fact that sow stalls are still in use in the vast majority of other countries - an inherently more productive way of maximising your sow output. That said, the UK performs very well in areas that are not linked directly to management of the sow during pregnancy - preweaning mortality rates are within the top quarter of European countries, and our growth rates over the grower period (7-35kg) were ranked number 1 in 2008 (493g/day).

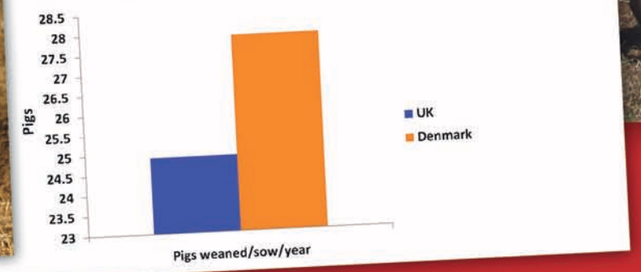
Surveillance of overall health continues via the British Pig Health Scheme using assessments at the abattoir. As an ongoing project, this is starting to build up a large amount of data on disease patterns and trends within the body of the national herd, the analysis of which will help with future planning both on individual units and regional/national schemes. Talking of regional schemes, funding has recently started coming through from the Regional Development Agencies to investigate disease eradication possibilities - this is an exciting area for the industry to contemplate and the pilot scheme underway in Yorkshire with the help of Yorkshire Forward and BPEX will pioneer the ideas that could end up expanding to be a national effort. Producers will be at the forefront of the project, with mapping the distribution of all the pigs in an area and their relevant health status being stage one of the process. Discussions will then allow formulation of eradication plans for areas based on the information gathered and the opinions of the local producer groups. This is a project that will come to fruition over the next 5-10 years and will be a driving force for the UK pig industry to focus around.

So the present time in the industry doesn't look so bleak, the future is certainly rosier than it has been for a while, and consumers are currently helping to put British pork and meat products back to the forefront of sales within the supermarkets - the 6th supermarket (of the major 12) has just converted to 100% British pork. Good signs for the road ahead - now's the time for the industry to really drive forward.









BRITISH PIG INDUSTRY

(Left) **Figure 2** - Net margin per pig sold in the UK (£/pig) - forecast figures used for June (source BPEX)

(Middle) **Figure 3** - UK production figures from herds ranked in the top third of producers from Q3 2006 and Q3 2008 (source Agrosoft)

(Below) **Figure 4** - Comparison of Q3 2008 quarterly production figures from UK and Danish herds ranked in the top third for their respective country (source Agrosoft)

Duncan Berkshire
Bishopton Veterinary Group

Duncan joined the pig department at XLVets Bishopton Veterinary Group in 2009 having previously worked extensively with pigs in Yorkshire since graduation. He qualified from Cambridge Vet School in 2004 and obtained his Masters in Livestock Health and Production with the Royal Veterinary College while in practice.

Duncan also holds the RCVS Certificate in Pig Medicine. Improving herd health and reproductive physiology are particular areas of interest, along with farm based investigations to introduce preventative medicine programme on unit.

For **FURTHER INFORMATION**, please contact your local XLVets Veterinary Practice, or Duncan at Bishopton Veterinary Group.

EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

XLVets - We Excel

The members of XLVets have worked hard to create what they see as a model of how practices can work together, sharing the latest ideas and passing on savings and joint expertise to clients.

The group comprises of a number of the foremost farm practices in the UK. With many years of combined experience, it is able to give expert advice on all areas of farm livestock, health and production.

XLVets Excellence in Practice

Invest in Health Don't pay for Disease

608 Vet Group
Solihull, West Midlands
Telephone: 0121 7053044

Allen and Partners
Whitland, Carmarthenshire
Telephone: 01994 240318

Alnorthumbria Veterinary Group
Alnwick, Northumberland
Telephone: 01665 510999

Ardene House Veterinary Practice
Aberdeen, Grampian
Telephone: 01224 740700

Belmont Veterinary Centre
Hereford, Herefordshire
Telephone: 01432 370155

Bishopton Veterinary Group
Ripon, North Yorkshire
Telephone: 01765 602396

Cain Veterinary Centre
Llansantffraid, Powys
Telephone: 01691 828205

Calweton Veterinary Group
Callington, Cornwall
Telephone: 01579 383231

Castle Veterinary Surgeons
Barnard Castle, Durham
Telephone: 01833 695695

Chapelfield Veterinary Partnership
Norwich, Norfolk
Telephone: 01508 530686

Cliffe Veterinary Group
Lewes, East Sussex
Telephone: 01273 473232

Clyde Veterinary Group
Lanark, Lanarkshire
Telephone: 01555 660000

Drove Veterinary Hospital
Swindon, Wiltshire
Telephone: 01793 522483

Endell Veterinary Group
Salisbury, Wiltshire
Telephone: 01722 333291

Farm First Veterinary Services
Abergavenny, Gwent
Telephone: 01873 840167

Farm Veterinary Solutions
Uppingham, Rutland
Telephone: 01572 822399

Fenwold Veterinary Centre
Spilsby, Lincolnshire
Telephone: 01790 752227

Friars Moor Veterinary Clinic
Sturminster Newton, Dorset
Telephone: 01258 472314

Glenthorne Veterinary Group
Uttoxeter, Staffordshire
Telephone: 01889 562164

Hook Norton Veterinary Surgeons
Banbury, Oxfordshire
Telephone: 01608 730085

Kingfisher Veterinary Practice
Crewkerne, Somerset
Telephone: 01460 77790

Kingsway Veterinary Group
Skipton, North Yorkshire
Telephone: 01756 793224

Lambert, Leonard & May
Nantwich, Cheshire
Telephone: 01948 663000

Larkmead Veterinary Group
Wallingford, Oxfordshire
Telephone: 01491 651479

Macpherson O'Sullivan Ltd
Shrewsbury, Shropshire
Telephone: 01743 860920

Millcroft Veterinary Group
Cockermouth, Cumbria
Telephone: 01900 826666

Minster Veterinary Practice
York, North Yorkshire
Telephone: 01904 643997

Northvet Veterinary Group
Kirkwall, Orkney
Telephone: 01856 873403

Paragon Veterinary Group
Carlisle, Cumbria
Telephone: 01228 710208

Penbode Veterinary Group
Holsworthy, Devon
Telephone: 01409 253418

Rosevean Veterinary Practice
Penzance, Cornwall
Telephone: 01736 362215

Scarsdale Veterinary Group
Derby, Derbyshire
Telephone: 01332 345191

Scott Mitchell Associates
Hexham, Northumberland
Telephone: 01434 608999

Shepton Veterinary Group
Shepton Mallet, Somerset
Telephone: 01749 341761

Southfield Veterinary Centre
Dorchester, Dorset
Telephone: 01305 262913

St Boniface Veterinary Clinic
Crediton, Exeter
Telephone: 01363 772860

Thrums Veterinary Group
Kirriemuir, Angus
Telephone: 01575 572643

Tyndale Farm Veterinary Practice
Berkeley, Gloucester
Telephone: 01453 511311

Wensum Valley Veterinary Surgeons
Fakenham, Norfolk
Telephone: 01328 864444

Westmorland Veterinary Group
Kendal, Cumbria
Telephone: 01539 722692

Willows Veterinary Group
Northwich, Cheshire
Telephone: 01606 723200

Wright & Morten
Macclesfield, Cheshire
Telephone: 01625 501500

www.xlvets.co.uk

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XLVets is a group of 42 independently owned, progressive veterinary practices, all committed to the future of the UK livestock industry. Spanning the length and breadth of the UK, we work together, sharing experience, knowledge and skills in order to define and deliver the highest standards of veterinary practice, animal health and productivity.

We strive to be at the heart of our farm clients' business as the primary source of highly valued on-farm advice and the central co-ordinating consultant for other farm services.

Founded in 2005, XLVets originated from a group of dynamic farm animal veterinary practices, who worked hard to create what they saw as a model of how individual practices can work successfully in partnership. Following a period of rapid growth, XLVets is now becoming recognised nationally as a 'quality mark' for veterinary care; not only for livestock, but also in the fields of small animal and equine care.

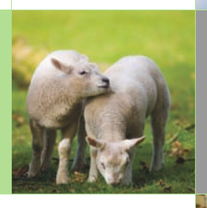
The group also endeavours to source and supply the highest quality, best-priced medicines, equipment, products and accessories.

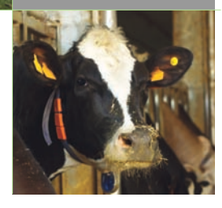
In addition, XLVets works alongside academic bodies and commercial research and manufacturing companies; forging strong industry partnerships to place its member practices at the forefront of veterinary science.

For farm clients of XLVets member practices this gives local access to many of the unique national initiatives the group develops; from health management, consultancy advice and disease prevention, through to bespoke analytical services to improve farm productivity and financial returns.

XLVets member practices are dedicated to providing a high quality, cost effective service to their clients, to support long-term growth and future prosperity within the UK livestock industry.

The future of agriculture needs a healthy industry, which needs healthy animals.
XLVets is committed to being a part of this healthy future.





XLVets
Excellence in Practice

For further information on XLVets and its member practices please contact the XLVets office on (01228) 711788 or e-mail admin@xlvets.co.uk

www.xlvets.co.uk

September 2009

XLVets 2009 CHARITY BIKE RIDE

XLVets get on their bikes for charity....

XLVets member practices will be getting on their bikes and cycling to this year's Dairy Event & Livestock Show, at Stoneleigh Park and raising money for two charities along the way.

The two XLVets calves will also be making the journey; one is starting at XLVets Northvet practice in Orkney and the other at XLVets Rosevean practice in Penzance. The calves have to be on the XLVets stand at the 2009 Dairy Event, so the 42 XLVets' member practices are getting on their bikes riding between practices and by working together, will get the calves safely to the show.

The event will herald the start of the XLVets autumn calf campaign, which focuses on promoting good calf husbandry. Following on from the journey of the two XLVets calves, a series of autumn calf health meetings will take place across the UK. The campaign will help raise awareness with farmers of the positive contribution that proactive veterinary involvement can make to the health of calves - the future of the herd.

As a nationwide group XLVets members work together, sharing experience, knowledge and skills in order to define and deliver the highest standards of veterinary practice, animal health and productivity. They strive to be at the heart of their farm client's business; as the primary source of highly valued on-farm advice and the central co-ordinating consultant for other farm services.

The bike ride will be raising money for two farming charities. The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI) is a charity that supports members of the farming community facing need, hardship or distress. The second charity, Farm Africa, is an international charity that provides training and support for poor rural communities to identify their needs and implement appropriate solutions to the key problems they face.

XLVets member practices will be cycling throughout August and during September, finishing with the arrival of the two calves at the Dairy Event & Livestock Show on Wednesday 16th September 2009. Progress of the cyclists and calves can be monitored by visiting the XLVets website www.xlvets.co.uk.

To MAKE A DONATION either pledge support through your local XLVets member practice or visit the XLVets bike ride dedicated website www.justgiving.com/xlvets.

For **FURTHER INFORMATION** please contact the **XLVets OFFICE** on (01228) 711788 or e-mail admin@xlvets.co.uk

NEW ZEALAND TRAVEL SCHOLARSHIP
XLVETS 2009

CONGRATULATIONS to the four people who were recently awarded XLVets New Zealand Dairy Travel Scholarships:

Amy Avery
Endell Veterinary Group

Joe Davis
Torbridge Veterinary Hospital

Mark Spilman
Bishopton Veterinary Group

Nicola Fair
Lambert, Leonard & May

The scholarship programme provides recipients with help from members of The Society of Dairy Cattle Veterinarians (DCV) of the New Zealand Veterinary Association to find suitable dairy practice employment in New Zealand.

As part of their scholarship the candidates will work in New Zealand and then receive an additional bursary for taking up employment with an XLVets member practice on their return to the UK.

Updates on their progress will be featured in future issues of the magazine.

XLVets would like to thank the DCV for their support with this SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME.

COMPETITION IN THE APRIL FARMING REVIEW All Practices have been notified and winners will be receiving their prizes soon! 10 FLEECES: **Lisa Holme** - Paragon Veterinary Group, **Mr P Chapman** - Penbode Veterinary Group, **Mrs P Bealby** - Farm Veterinary Solutions, **M Mason** - Westmorland Veterinary Group, **Mrs D Brice** - Larkmead Veterinary Group, **Mr P Stanway** - Wright & Morten, **Mrs A Dunning** - Friars Moor Veterinary Clinic, **Julie Webster** - Glenthorne Veterinary Group, **Alison Ritch** - Northvet Veterinary Group, **Brendan John** - Chapelfield Veterinary Partnership. CASE OF WINE: **Gordon Coward** - Minster Veterinary Practice.

TRAINING PROGRAMMES
FOR OUR FARMERS

It is said that a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing; but what if that knowledge was practically based, and focused on delivering improvements in the health of your livestock and in your business's profits? Then the saying knowledge is power may be more appropriate, and that's what a new training initiative from XLVets hopes to achieve for farmers across the UK.

The new training programme will be launched at The Dairy Event and Livestock Show at Stoneleigh Park in Warwickshire on the 16th and 17th September. If you're around on either of those two days, why not pop along to the stand 641 next to the Judging Ring and see how XLVets and you can work together to achieve high quality training for farm business success.

CASE STUDY

Debby Brown - Castle Veterinary Surgeons

Castle Veterinary Surgeons

SHEEP FLOCK PLANNING

Richard Ward **Cragg Top Farm, Langley Dale, Barnard Castle**

Richard Ward became concerned by poor lamb body condition and lower than expected live weight in offspring from his 600-strong Lleyn flock. What's more, a 6% barren figure from shearlings put to the tup in November 2008 and the death of several seemingly healthy lambs at weaning created further frustration.

Investigations began with XLVets' Debby Brown of Castle Veterinary Surgeons, Barnard Castle and the Thirsk-based Veterinary Laboratories Agency identifying the root cause and devising a prevention plan.

Blood testing of hoggs from an ill thrifty group and a number of hoggs entering the main flock for tupping revealed a severe cobalt deficiency.

Debby Brown explains that cobalt is required for the manufacture of vitamin B12, which is used in the liver for energy production. It's an essential dietary element. A deficiency can lead to ovine white liver disease which severely affects animal performance and health.

'Growing animals have a higher requirement for vitamin B12 so consequently the clinical signs appear most commonly in weaned lambs, during the summer.'

'Sheep tend to be extremely susceptible to cobalt deficiency because their cobalt requirement is about twice that of cattle. Vitamin B12 production in the rumen drops off rapidly within days if there is a cobalt deficiency in the diet.'

'Blood sampling provides an immediate reflection of dietary cobalt intake and vitamin B12 concentrations,' she adds.

Richard Ward farms a mixed system based at Cragg Top Farm, Langley Dale near Barnard Castle in partnership with his father Peter. They farm three holdings which are all at different stages of organic status and the Less Favoured Area land is managed under an Organic Entry Level Scheme, while one holding has entered a 10-year Higher Level management scheme.

Before cobalt deficiency was found, the Wards' flock already had a practical flock health plan in place which proved invaluable as a sound starting point, says Debby Brown.

'Richard keeps very good farm records to measure livestock performance, which also helps with his organic farm assurance. From these we knew how lambs were being managed from birth to slaughter. This helped us identify the probable causes of dietary cobalt deficiency.

Investigations were widened to testing for soil trace elements of grazing pastures as it's recognised that cobalt availability is associated with a number of factors including soil pH, soil condition and grass height and condition.

Most at risk from low cobalt uptake are lambs grazing pastures during rapid grass growth and in mature pasture. Well-drained soils show a higher cobalt reading than waterlogged land.

High levels of soil manganese will also depress cobalt uptake from pastures, and this was also measured for.

Soil testing revealed that while manganese levels were normal, the well-drained soils at Cragg Top were generally low in cobalt which in turn affects pasture cobalt levels.

Therefore, cobalt supplementation of weaned lambs was recommended. Richard Ward began by administering a slow release bolus to last year's lambs at weaning. However, further observations and tests revealed that the bolus treatment failed to correct the cobalt deficiency in the growing lambs.

This year, lambs were injected with a B12 solution at about 6 to 8 weeks old. Because B12 injections are not long lasting, this will be repeated whenever lambs are gathered for worming or other interventions.

Vet Debby Brown says injections are considered a practical and cost effective method of short term supplementation for fattening lambs.

To try and boost soil and grass cobalt levels, Mr Ward is considering applying a cobalt sulphate to at risk pasture land. Lambs feeding on a chicory mix will also be tested to assess whether the crop can help improve the cobalt situation. He also feels that the health status of his soils will improve naturally from stopping artificial fertiliser use.

Research by the group also found that the Lleyn breed may also require more vitamin B12 than other breeds, owing to the high wool quality of the breed.

'We're learning at each stage', admits Mr Ward. 'When something doesn't have an effect we can strike it off and assess the next step. I'm eager to find a solution and will keep trying until we do.'

Left
Land at Cragg Top Farm reaches 1,000ft and started organic conversion in 2005.

Right
Well-drained soils at Cragg Top were found to be low in cobalt.

Richard Ward is working hard to boost cobalt levels in his flock while reducing overall inputs.

(Above) Richard Ward
Cragg Top Farm

Flock health plans need to be practical and flexible says XLVets' Debby Brown.

(Above) Debby Brown
Castle Veterinary Surgeons

Left
Richard Ward is also breeding easy care suckler cows from Stabiliser bloodlines.

Right
Since converting to organic status, Cragg Top Farm is aiming to be self sufficient in animal feed.

Below
Grazing and soil management has improved as a result of flock health planning, Richard Ward says.

Following training by Castle Vets, Mr Ward has used faecal egg counts as a guide to the level of parasitism in his flock. This has helped lower the farm's worm burden and shape a new control strategy to prevent wormer resistance.

'By avoiding exposure to high numbers of parasites, we've been able to minimise the reliance on and use of anthelmintics. The results were surprising and often totally different to what I expected. This was a good scheme to be involved in and I'm just disappointed it has ended,' says Mr Ward.

Animal bio-security has also improved under his organic system, through maintaining a closed sheep flock and suckler cow herd.

'Organic conversion has created a number of challenges but I'm enjoying the experience. Farm health planning covers a wide spectrum and learning more about my soil status has been extremely interesting,' he adds.

Mr Ward has developed a mixed rotation including cereals under sown with grass grown with peas and beans to help build up soil nitrogen reserves and produce high protein winter feed for his sheep and cattle. More clover is being introduced into pastures using a variety of methods, again to help boost soil nitrogen and feeding quality. Root crops are also grown to finish lambs on, with the aim of achieving a 20kg carcase from lambs out of Charollais rams. 'We're aiming to be self sufficient in feed to help lower feed costs and offer a totally traceable system.'

Breeding replacements are kept only from his 'easy care' ewes, which require no assistance at lambing, possess good mothering instinct and provide sufficient milk.

This strategy is paying off with good lambing results from an outdoor lambing system. He chooses to house ewes from mid-Jan to April to relieve grazing pressure. Ewes are split based on scanned results and fed a diet to match their energy requirements with triplet carrying ewes receiving extra supplementation.

Due to a high level of biosecurity both in terms of his stock and reduced reliance on bought-in feed, Mr Ward has stopped vaccinating his breeding ewes for both enzootic and toxoplasma abortion.

However, with Debby Brown, he continues to monitor for the abortion very closely.

An 'easy care' approach has been adopted in his spring calving suckler herd bred from Stabiliser bulls. He describes his herd as suited to a grass-based system, good to calve and possessing a nice temperament. Offspring are sold as stores at 18 months.

Mr Ward maintains a good flock health status through regular contact with Castle Vets. This includes telephone conversations and planned farm visits every couple of months.

'Given our current cobalt situation, Debby takes regular blood samples to assess the mineral status and check we're on course. Without measuring and monitoring there's no way we can make adjustments. This keeps me interested as I'm always looking at ways to improve the farm profitability. Even the smallest improvement makes all the effort worthwhile.'

Debby Brown explains that a flock health plan shouldn't be onerous. 'In Richard's case, it's designed to be flexible and adjusted and we look at all aspects of management that can affect animal health. It's a working document, not a just a pile of papers that sit gathering dust. Importantly, we keep reviewing and updating the plan and through Richard's dedicated and enthusiastic approach I'm confident that he'll continue to achieve real gains.'

Having taken the decision to farm organically, Richard Ward's committed approach to animal health has paid off in other areas, notably worm control. He volunteered to act as a demonstration farm for the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) scheme to prevent anthelmintic resistance and control Nematodirosis - a particularly nasty disease in lambs.

Charollais X Lleyn lambs

ISSUES

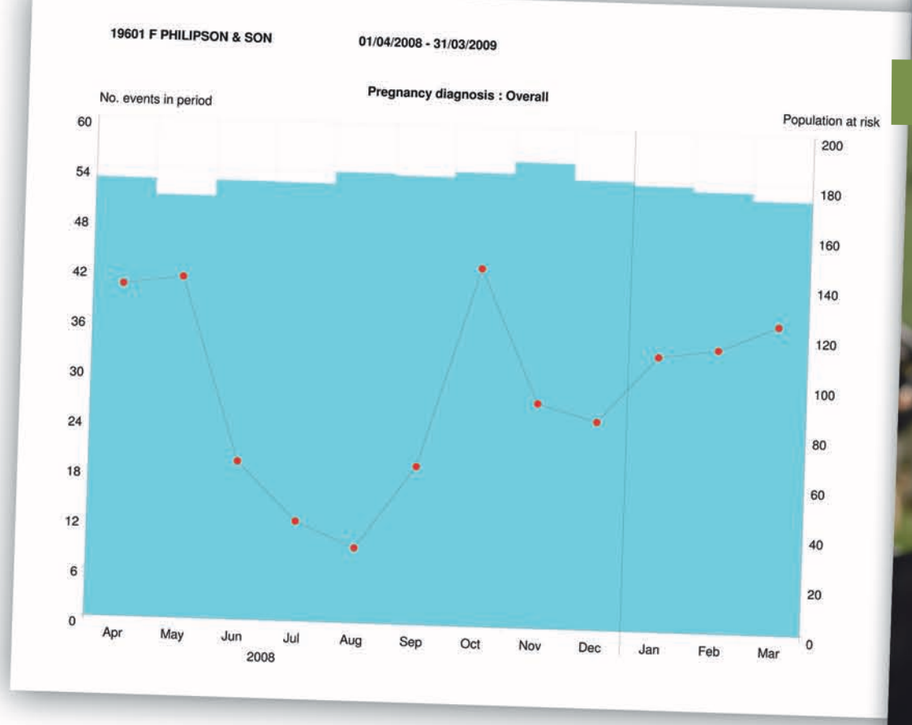
BEING TACKLED AT **CRAGG TOP FARM** THROUGH FLOCK HEALTH PLANNING

- Improve lamb body condition
- Identify and correct cobalt deficiency
- Boost soil trace elements
- Prevent anthelmintic resistance
- Maintain good farm biosecurity
- Preserve organic status

Above Charollais X Lleyn lambs receive cobalt supplementation during handling.

While increasing dairy herd numbers and yields Cumbrian producer FRANK PHILIPSON has maintained already tight fertility management without any extra labour.

Fertility MANAGEMENT



Vet RICHARD KNIGHT of Westmorland Veterinary Group in Kendal…

Over the last two years herd numbers have increased from 157 to 180 cows aiming for 200 by the end of 2009 and yields have risen to 9,000 litres.

Frank and his wife Janet employ two full time men at the 320 acre Canonwinder farm at Flookburgh on the south coast of Cumbria and with total annual milk yields running at 1.6 million litres this equates to a production of more than half a million litres for each man managing the cows.

Keeping on top of the fertility has been as a result of the installation of ai24 Heatime (Semex) activity meters in June 2008. The Philipsons made an investment of £3,000 for the system and 70 collars which Frank says has more than paid for itself.

'We have maintained our calving interval as well as increasing cow numbers and milk yields for what would be the equivalent cost of two replacement heifers. We have also saved on semen costs,' said Frank.

'The system is an extra management tool which is recording the cows' activities 24 hours a day,' he added.

Herd numbers and yields have been built up without buying in any females. In the last three years heifers, which calve at just over 23 months old, have been AI'd with sexed semen and some of these daughters are coming into the herd this year. In anticipation of having surplus females to sell, Frank, having used all pedigree Holstein semen, is registering the herd.

Data gathered with the Philipsons' vet Richard Knight, of Westmorland Veterinary Group in Kendal, who makes fortnightly routine visits to Canonwinder, revealed immediate results following the installation of the system. The herd's median calving interval has been maintained and is running at 368 days.

A group of 58 cows were fitted with collars and compared with another group of 69, all of which calved from June 1 to September 17, the herd's peak calving period.

'Heat detection rates were significantly better after the installation of the system - 61 percent for the cows with collars compared with 22 per cent for the control group,' said Richard.

'Calving to first service was 10 days less, while calving to conception interval was the same, so by 63 days calved 20 per cent more cows were served.'

'Positive pregnancy diagnoses during my routine visits were 12 per cent higher in cows on the system.'

'There also appears to be a small reduction in the use of prostaglandin injection with more aberrant heats due to ovarian follicular cysts being detected too,' he added.

Cows' activity is monitored 24 hours a day by the electronic neck collars which are detected by a reader as each animal leaves the parlour twice a day and the information is analysed by a control box.

Infrared technology gives improved accuracy of data transfer revealing exactly when a cow should be inseminated.

'The system is very easy to use and it is farmer-friendly. Because it is monitoring the cows through the night, it picks up on cows which may only be bulling for a couple of hours and then by morning milking showing no sign. It also gives a precise time of peak activity so that I can time the AI accurately for 12 to 15 hours later and improve conception rates,' said Frank.

'It has also picked up cows which are lame and other conditions such as a twisted stomach. With so many heifers coming into the herd - 40 of the current 166 milkers are heifers and there is a total of 121 heifers on the farm - it checks their activity as they are the most vulnerable group at housing,' he added.

Ideally Frank would like all cows other than those which are dry to have collars. All are fitted within two weeks of calving until they are pregnancy diagnosed in calf, however the collar was left on one cow which was carrying twins to monitor her progress.