

Keep stock healthy over winter for best fertility

THERE are a number of ways for farmers to help keep their stock healthy over the winter.

Cow and ewe winter health – can I measure it?

Ensuring that stock stays healthy over winter is vital, with many of these animals carrying next year's young. Making sure that these young carry to term and develop normally is the main aim of the winter period. Overwintering is also the ideal time to control lameness, and to make sure these animals are pregnant.

What are the main problems over winter?

Ensuring your animals have the correct condition for their current status is vital, as overfat animals are more prone to problems around calving or lambing, while animals losing weight can be a sign for a number of issues. Lameness, para-

VETERINARY ADVICE

Jake Lawson, of Kingsway Veterinary Group, discusses ways of keeping stock healthy over the winter

sites and general illness are some of the main reasons for weight loss during this time.

As well as this, ensuring these animals have the right trace elements can help avoid issues, such as sway-back in lambs, or weak calves if iodine is low.

How can I ensure stock is in the right condition?

Body condition scoring (BCS) animals over winter will help you pick up any problems earlier, with spring-calving cows wanting to be a BCS 3 at weaning, falling to 2.5 at calving, with this process occurring steadily over this period.

Autumn calving herds should calve down with a BCS of 3, falling to 2.5 at

mating. A useful guide to condition scoring can be found on the Defra website.

The condition score for sheep is dependent on the breed, with hill breeds ideally wanting to be a BCS 2 over the winter period, upland sheep a 2.5 and lowland sheep a 3.

Can I check whether nutrition is a problem?

Obviously, nutrition is a major aspect of overwintering stock, and can make or break a key period in an animal's life. Making sure that they are being fed correctly can be achieved by testing for chemicals known as NEFAs and BHBs.

NEFAs can be tested pre-calving and give an idea of whether there are likely to be



ADVICE OFFERED:
Jake Lawson

problems after calving, while BHBs are done post-calving for similar reasons.

Combining these samples can provide an overview of the nutritional status of your herd and whether they need more feed before calving, or aren't eating enough after.

Urea can also be tested to assess energy status and protein intakes when combined with the other two tests. These can also be useful in sheep. Ask your vet about metabolic profiling for your flock or herd.

How can I assess lameness in my stock?

Lameness can cause many problems in stock, from

poor condition scores to poor fertility, so being able to assess which animals need attention and correction, and ultimately which animals will be best to get rid of, is very useful.

Mobility scoring uses a 0-3 system, with 0 having no visible lameness at all, and 3 being animals that cannot keep up with the herd.

Mobility-scoring your herd at housing is a useful way of targeting the lamest animals, giving you the opportunity to pay extra attention to these animals. DairyCo has a useful guide to mobility-scoring cattle, and your vet will also be able to go through mobility-scoring and any lameness issues you may have.

Lameness in sheep can have drastic effects on the condition and reproductive performance of the affected animals. Regularly assessing lameness in your flock, and then picking animals up to diagnose the cause of the problem is vital to ensuring your sheep stay healthy over this time.

How important is scanning animals?

Knowing whether an animal is pregnant, and whether she has multiple foetuses is a very useful tool for keeping animals fit over

winter, and also for knowing whether you should be keeping any barren animals at all, allowing you to conserve feed stocks for pregnant animals.

Scanning is particularly important in sheep, allowing you to feed singles differently to twins and triplets, so the singles don't get over-condition, and the twin ewes keep condition on them.

Pregnancy diagnosis in cattle is useful for getting rid of barren cows, and if done early enough, for assessing the bull used and catching any he has missed.

What about trace elements?

Knowing the trace element status of your animals is vital to ensure good returns around lambing and calving time, with copper, cobalt and selenium the main problems, and iodine also playing a part.

Blood-sampling animals, so you know what they need supplementing with, is important to ensure you don't overdose or treat unnecessarily. Speak to your vet with regards to sampling and to decide what is best for your animals.

If you have any queries about the health of your animals over winter, then contact your veterinary practice.

alnorthumbria
veterinary group
T: 01665 510999
www.alnorthumbriavets.co.uk

paragon
T: 01228 710208
www.paragonvet.com

bi-shopton
T: 01765 602396
www.bi-shoptonvets.co.uk

Capon
T: 014977 2318
www.caponvets.co.uk

South of Solihull
T: 01434 68999 - www.vets1.com

Westonland
Veterinary Group
T: 01539 722692
www.westonlandvets.co.uk

Castle Bromley
T: 01833 695695
www.castlebromley.net

MILLCROFT
T: 01900 826666
www.milicroftvets.co.uk

Minster
T: 01904 486712
www.minstervets.co.uk

KINGSWAY
Veterinary Group

Skipton Auction Mart, Gargrave Road, Skipton, BD23 1UD
T: 01756 700940 | www.kingswayvets.co.uk

XLvets is a group of 52 farm-animal committed vet practices working together across the UK by sharing best practice. We aim to deliver the best health advice for your farm.

XLvets
Excellence in Practice
www.xlvets.co.uk

Antibiotic resistance

THE issue of antibiotic resistance in humans has been described by the Chief Medical Officer as a "catastrophic threat" and was raised at the G8 summit of global world leaders earlier this year.

But the British Veterinary Association (BVA) used European Antibiotic Awareness Day (EAAD) in November to raise awareness of the need for responsible use of antibiotics – or antimicrobials – in animals too.

While antibiotics are essen-

tial for both human and animal health, it said irresponsible use – including overuse, underuse and misuse – could lead to resistance and, ultimately, to these medicines becoming ineffective.

The BVA has produced two client leaflets aimed at farmers and pet owners to explain antibiotic resistance.

Peter Jones, BVA past president, said: "The veterinary profession is acutely aware of the problem of antibiotic resistance and BVA has been working for many years to

promote responsible use of these vital medicines.

"We all know that antibiotic resistance is a serious threat, but animal owners need help to understand what that means in practice and what they can do to reduce the likelihood of resistance developing."

The leaflets are available for veterinary practices to download alongside a range of other resources, including posters and guidance for veterinary vets, at bva.co.uk/eaad.

New version of vet iPhone app

NORBROOK, one of the UK's leading veterinary pharmaceutical companies, has launched a new version of its successful free iPhone app, approved by Apple.

The Norbrook Veterinary Excellence Tool includes an

interactive dosing calculator, which will help with the administration and compliance of the company's products by calculating and assessing the correct dosage at the touch of a button.

Barry McInerney, MVB,

MRCVS, company veterinary adviser, said the update to the app would also make it easier for vets to contact their local territory manager.

The Norbrook VET iPhone app is free to download from the iTunes store.