

Weather leaves legacy of liver fluke in lambs

THE weather – past, current and pending – will influence your lambing time.

The aim of this article is to provide some topical advice for what to do during the lambing period if things are not quite going to plan.

My management hasn't changed, yet my ewes lack condition

Last year's mild winter and wet summer left a legacy of variable forage and an exceptionally high challenge from liver fluke.

Many ewes will have become burdened with fluke from grazing over the autumn and early winter. Left untreated, this will undermine body condition, particularly as the liver is put under strain near to lambing.

This year, we have witnessed multiple treatment failures. The reason varies, but include inappropriate product choice or use, and re-infection or drug resistance. If you suspect your flukicide isn't working, then speak to your vet.

Ewes are aborting in the weeks running up to lambing. Should I take action now or try to ride out my bad luck?

All farms will experience some abortions in the run-up to lambing. However, if the number of abortions looks to exceed two per cent, it will be likely the cause is infectious and action is advised to reduce present and future losses.

If you get an early cluster, seek help. Your priority is to get a prompt diagnosis, so liaise with your veterinary surgery.

They can arrange for lab

VETERINARY ADVICE

Rod Welford, BVM&S MRCVS, of Millcroft Veterinary Group, Cumbria, provides advice on dealing with liver fluke in sheep

tests to determine the causal agents.

The actions to mitigate current losses, limit the spread and prevent future abortions are all based on this diagnosis.

While waiting for results, isolate the aborted or aborting ewes and dispose of aborted matter. Be aware of the risks to humans. Pregnant women should have no contact with lambing ewes.

The most common infectious causes of abortion include enzootic abortion, toxoplasmosis, campylobacter, listeriosis and anaplasmosis (TBF). Once a diagnosis is achieved, your veterinary practice will advise you what to do next.

Odd ewes are depressed and trembling in the run-up to lambing. Is this cause



LAMB CARE: Rod Welford, of Millcroft Veterinary Group

for concern?

Ewes close to lambing commonly suffer from two conditions – pregnancy toxæmia (twin lamb disease) and hypocalcaemia. This is normally seen in ewes with poor body condition, whereby supporting the growth of one or more lambs has put too much pressure on the body.

These conditions can go hand-in-hand, so it is advisable to treat for both in those affected. Administer calcium by injection, supplemented with a calcium-rich high-energy drench on a daily basis until appetite has fully recovered. Individually, pen the poorly ewe, so she doesn't need to compete for food.

Liver damage among ewes owing to fluke will increase the incidence of pregnancy toxæmia.

I'm getting a high barren rate and deformed lambs. What could it be?

Schmallenberg virus has encroached well into Northern England, so must be considered when facing a troubled lambing. Your vet will be able to run tests to confirm this or other causes.

Is there anything I can do to prevent young lambs getting sick?

Colostrum and hygiene are your best allies. Watery mouth and joint ill are diseases lambs get in the early stages of life owing to an overwhelming challenge by

bacteria on the lamb's naive immune system.

Colostrum is the "second breath of life" containing the antibodies required to fight off the bugs in their environment. Mothering-up and attention to colostrum intake is key.

If sheep colostrum is not available, artificial colostrum or cow colostrum can be good alternatives.

Maintaining a clean and hygienic environment will also reduce the incidence of disease as well as disinfecting newborn lambs' navels.

If the challenge gets too much owing to factors out of your control (bad weather, overcrowding etc), seek veterinary assistance, as antibiotics might be required to prevent new infections, as well treating those already ailing.

Wishing you a smooth lambing and good flock health for 2013.



HIGH LEVELS: sheep's liver infested with liver fluke

John appointed chairman

JOHN MacFarlane (pictured), Alnthumbria Veterinary Group director, has been appointed chairman of XLVets.

He succeeds Don McMillan who held the post for two and a half years.

XLVets is a group of independent veterinary

practices that work together to achieve the highest standards of veterinary care.

The group was founded in 2005 by a number of farm animal veterinary practices and has since undergone a period of rapid growth with a 51-strong membership throughout the UK.

Mr MacFarlane was a founder director and board member until 2007, before being re-elected to the board in June this year.

He said: "I am as passionate about the organisation now as I was in 2005."

"I wholeheartedly believe that when a group of practices work together, we are stronger than the sum of our parts."

"Our programme for 2013 promises to be our most exciting yet, with some really big initiatives in the pipeline."

"My biggest challenge as chairman will be keeping up with all the opportunities which XLVets provides."

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XLVets is a group of 50 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.

www.xlvets.co.uk