

# Put systems in place to make life a little easier

Is it fair to say that in life some things that should get done, don't – simply because it's just too complicated? Maybe with a good summer behind us and slightly less grief than normal, we could put a bit of thought into having some systems and processes in place, so that what might seem like a hassle is made a little easier.

Let's test that theory with a few scenarios. Obviously none of these apply to you but you may know someone to whom it does.

## Scenario one: I've got a lame cow. What should I do?

Answer (wrong but has been known): I'll give it a jab of antibiotics and see how it goes. A few days on, the stone in its foot has pressed further in and a deep infection results.

The cow by now has a very swollen and very sore foot. I'll give the cow a jab of "something stronger". That doesn't work either. The foot trimmer chap, who is in huge demand, comes out a week later. He can't do much with it.

I show it to the vet. She says it needs a claw amputat-

## VETERINARY ADVICE

**Roger Scott, of Scott Mitchell Associates, takes a tongue-in-cheek look at some of the ways of dealing with animal ailments**

ed. I'm fed up, I get the cow shot. I've lost a cow, the calf has lost a mother, I've spent a load of money on drugs, foot trimmers and vets. I don't like being a farmer.

Correct answer: I think back to the foot-trimming course, which I went on and which I enjoyed enormously. I get the cow into my well-oiled foot crush, which I bought, for a very reasonable sum, off a local merchant. I tighten the belly band, lift the foot and

*"The vet says the cow needs a claw amputation. I'm fed up. I get the cow shot. I don't like being a farmer"*

remove the stone.

The crush cost me about the same as the value of the cow. I found removing the stone most satisfying, the cow reared its calf and she's back in calf again. I like being a farmer.

## Scenario two: I've got a cow who calved this morning but she's gone down. What should I do?

Answer (wrong but has been known): I give her calcium. She's not up that night, so I give her some more. She's not up the next day, so I give her some more.

Later that day, I suspect there's more going on, so I call the vet out. The vet diagnoses advanced toxic mastitis and that the cow's knackered. I get the cow shot, the calf loses its mother.

Correct answer: I get help from my neighbour's son, who happens to be an Olympic weightlifter. We roll the cow onto her back and

check that her legs aren't broken.

We strip each quarter and spot some watery milk in the back right. We strip the quarter out (it seems to take forever!). The vet advises flunixin and an antibiotic we've never had before – it does the trick.

The vet demonstrates his rumen pump and gives her three buckets of water in a matter of seconds. I buy a pump just like it and do the same the next day. She gets up. I love my new pump and I still like being a farmer!

## Scenario three: My sheep are scratching. What should I do?

Answer (wrong but has been known): I start lambing today, so I'll treat them for lice and hope for the best.

A few weeks later I've just finished lambing, but they're still scratching. I've had a letter from a solicitor saying my neighbour is going to sue me and report me to Defra

because he's had scab diagnosed and he says it's my fault.

I get the vet out who diagnoses scab from a couple of skin scrapes. I've got a problem – what was 100 ewes is now 100 ewes and 150 lambs – ahhhhhhrrrrggggghhhh.

Ideal answer: I take a close look at the sheep with my recently upgraded reading spectacles and a head torch I got for Christmas.

There are no lice to be seen. I call the vet who does a couple of skin scrapes. It's scab. I inject the 100 ewes with an appropriate avermectin, which I am reminded will cover the unborn lambs and will worm the ewes too.

I don't hear a squeak from my neighbour or his solicitor or Defra. I've finished lambing, so I quite like being a farmer!

## Scenario four: my great grandfather's mate in the Boer War told him

**that red wine was an excellent wormer. We've used it ever since, but for the past 105 years we've had a lot of scour and poor growth rates in the lambs and heifers.**

Answer (wrong and to be fair has never been known): I wonder if he got it wrong, so I try white wine instead, but still make sure it's from South Africa. It doesn't make any difference and the bank closes me down.

Ideal answer: I refer to the health plan that was lovingly prepared by my local vet. I notice it has a section on worming. I follow the advice about worm egg counts and when to worm and what to use. The lambs and heifers are doing well this year. I like being a farmer and have made enough money to visit Rourke's Drift where my great-grandfather's friend's great-grandson has a successful vineyard.

## A five-tonne lamb output is realistic

ACHIEVING five tonnes of lamb output each year from a tup is a realistic target for commercial flocks with productive ewes, according to Eblex.

However, the average is closer to 2.9 tonnes per tup and the Eblex Better Returns Programme (BRP) is working with vets in Cumbria, Northumberland and Devon to survey commercial rams before the start of the breeding season.

They will do more than 200 ram MOTs, across a range of breeds and locations. The information collected will be used to understand if, and why, rams are failing their annual MOT and the level of fertility problems.

Results will be available from late autumn.

Dr Liz Genever, Eblex senior livestock scientist, said farmers could calculate how much

lamb their rams produced last year by multiplying the number of ewes put to each tup by the number of lambs reared per ewe, multiplied by the average sale weight.

For example: 70 x 1.71 x 42 = 5 tonnes of lamb per tup

The first step in achieving a five-tonne target is having the confidence to go for the optimum ewe-to-ram ratio, which needs rams to be fit, ready to work and fertile.

Dr Genever said: "This year, there is a risk that recent hot weather will reduce ram fertility, as testicular degeneration can occur after over-heating.

"The scrotum is rich in sweat glands that cool the testicles, if it is able to hang in the breeze. However, sheep will pant and lie down when they are hot, to transfer heat away from their bodies through their abdomen.

"By doing this, rams are

lying on their testicles and cooking them. To help avoid this, ensure rams are shorn, have adequate shade, plenty of water and are not over-fat. It takes about seven weeks for sperm to be produced."

She said a simple ram MOT ten weeks before tupping involves the five Ts: toes – check his locomotion, arthritis and feet; teeth – check for under or over shot teeth, gaps and molar abscesses; tone – aim for body condition between 3.5 and 4.0; treat – ensure vaccinations are up-to-date and check for parasites and lameness; testicles – check firmness (they should feel like a flexed bicep) with no lumps or bumps. Measure the circumference around the widest part, with the targets for mature rams being more than 36cm and ram lambs more than 34cm.

**XLvets**  
Excellence in Practice  
www.xlvets.co.uk

The Auction Mart, Tyne Green, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 3SG  
T: 01434 608999 • www.vets1.co.uk

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

**paragon**  
T: 01228 710208  
www.paragonvet.com

**blishton**  
T: 01765 602396  
www.blishtonvets.co.uk

**capontree**  
T: 016977 2318  
www.capontreevets.co.uk

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

**Widmarland**  
T: 01539 722692  
www.widmarlandvets.co.uk

**Castle Veterinary Practice**  
T: 01833 695095  
www.castlevets.net

**KINGSWAY**  
T: 01756 709940  
www.kingswayvets.co.uk

**MILLCROFT**  
T: 01900 626666  
www.millicroftvets.co.uk