FARM NEWSLETTER

October 2023

A word from our Directors

- Charlie Neale

The Dairy Show each year to me marks that we are now in Autumn, maize has been or is being harvested, the last cuts of grass are being taken and many of our Autumn cows have now calved.

The dairy show gives us a chance to celebrate our fantastic industry before the dark nights of winter set in and this year we, at Shepton Vets wanted to showcase that we are 'going further for our farmers'. This means both literally, as within in the past year we have expanded our geographical range in all directions and figuratively in terms of the services and expertise that we're offering.

These include (but are not limited to!) the new mobility service, expansion to our training portfolio and our benchmarking/advisory meetings that we hope to see as well attended as last year.

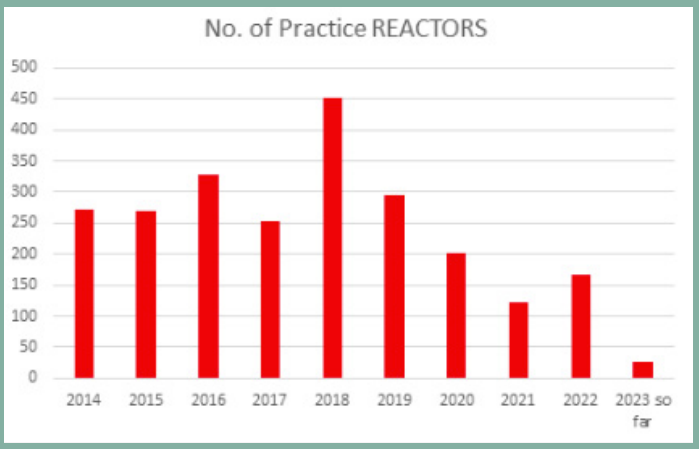
We were very pleased to see so many of you on our stand and hope to see you all at the various events that we will look to put on over the next few months.

TB OR NOT TB

The practice has kept a table of the number of skin test reactors disclosed over the last 10 years, as follows:

*To 31st August 2023.

Year	No. Of Reactors	% change
2014	271	
2015	270	-0.3
2016	329	+22
2017	254	-23
2018	451	+78
2019	296	-34
2020	201	-22
2021	122	-39
2022	166	+36
2023 so far	27*	



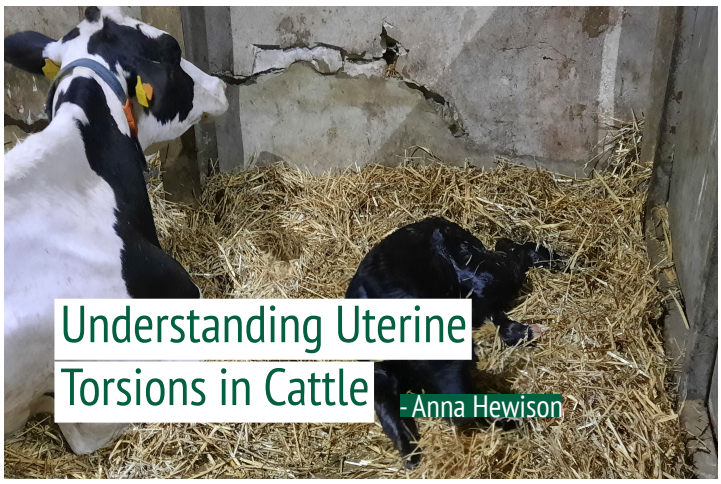
Wildlife culling started in 2017, 2018 or 2019 in 3 different areas covered by the practice. The 78% increase in 2018 was mainly due to an explosive breakdown in one herd. We saw significant reductions in the number of skin reactors from 2019 – 21 but a disappointing increase in 2022. 2022 was a hot dry summer and although we have had hot dry summers in 2019 and 2020, last year seemed to have been worse. In 2022, badgers and cattle were both short of food, leading to increased contact between the 2 species. Badgers were forced out into open fields in search of food and cattle grazed the bottoms of hedgerows, where the former like to have their latrines, some of which will have been infected with bovine TB.

Given annual variation it can be better to look at several years together to gain a realistic idea of the situation. The figures show a marked reduction in the number of TB reactors for 2021 to 2023, down to around 110 reactors per year, compared to typically 280 reactors seen in 2014 to 2017 (black bars above).

Our figures do not include gamma (blood) test positive animals, so the total number of cattle slaughtered since 2019 (when gamma testing was introduced) will be higher in official figures. The gamma test removed animals which were likely to become skin reactors, IRs or slaughterhouse cases at a later date. This is the reason why gamma testing results in herd restrictions being lifted sooner than if skin testing alone was used.

Defra figures show that about 66% of IRs subsequently become reactors or suspect slaughterhouse cases at a later date. It is a practice recommendation that IRs are not put back in calf and are culled at the end of their lactations.

To find out more about reducing the risk of TB in your herd and new aspects of TB testing and control come to our TBAS meeting on 18th October. This meeting is free of charge, but you must register in advance.



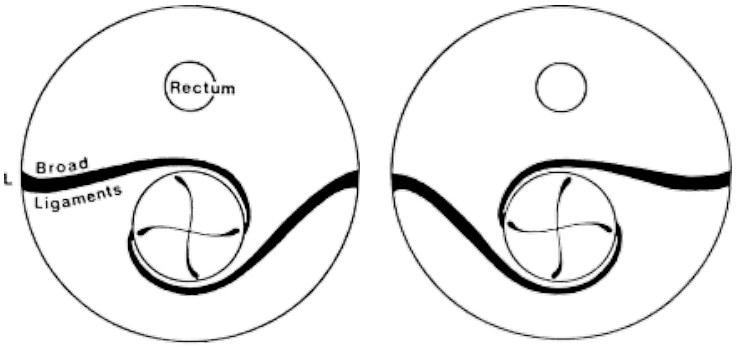
Understanding Uterine Torsions in Cattle

- Anna Hewison

In the last month I have seen 5 uterine torsions which has prompted me to do some research. A recent study found that up to 22% of dystocia's attended by vets were torsions, and the overall incidence of torsions in UK Holstein Friesians is 0.24% (Lyons et al., 2012). Twisting normally occurs during 1st stage or early 2nd stage labour when the pregnant horn rotates over the non-pregnant horn, most commonly in an anti-clockwise direction. The twist can vary between 90 degrees and 360 degrees. A definitive cause is unknown; however, it has been found that cows are at greater risk than heifers and twins are less of a risk (Aubry et al., 2008). At full term the uterus lies on the abdominal floor and is relatively unstable. When a cow lies down or stands up the uterus becomes suspended by the cervix in the abdominal cavity. It is thought that the combination of increased calf movements during 1st stage labour and a sudden slip, fall or knock by another cow could cause the unstable uterus to twist. Other potential influences are a small non-pregnant horn, decreased amounts of foetal fluid, reduced rumen volume and a large calf.

One of the greatest influences on success is whether the calf is alive or dead as it is easier to correct a torsion with a live calf. Quickly spotting cows with a uterine torsion will have a better chance of a successful outcome as a twisted uterus has its blood flow interrupted so it becomes fragile. Cows will generally be uncomfortable and shifting but will not always start pushing or show any membranes at the vulva. When examining the cow, you generally find that your arm is pushed to the left or right hand side and the calf can be hard to reach or upside down.

There are several methods to correct a torsion – manual untwisting, rolling the cow, detorsion rod and c-section. It is important to remember that after untwisting a torsion the cervix is often not fully dilated, therefore we need to be very careful with vaginal delivery of the calf. A study found that the next lactation culling rate of cows who had a torsion was 57%, with over half of these due to infertility (Lyons et al., 2013), however more research needs to be done into longer term outcomes.

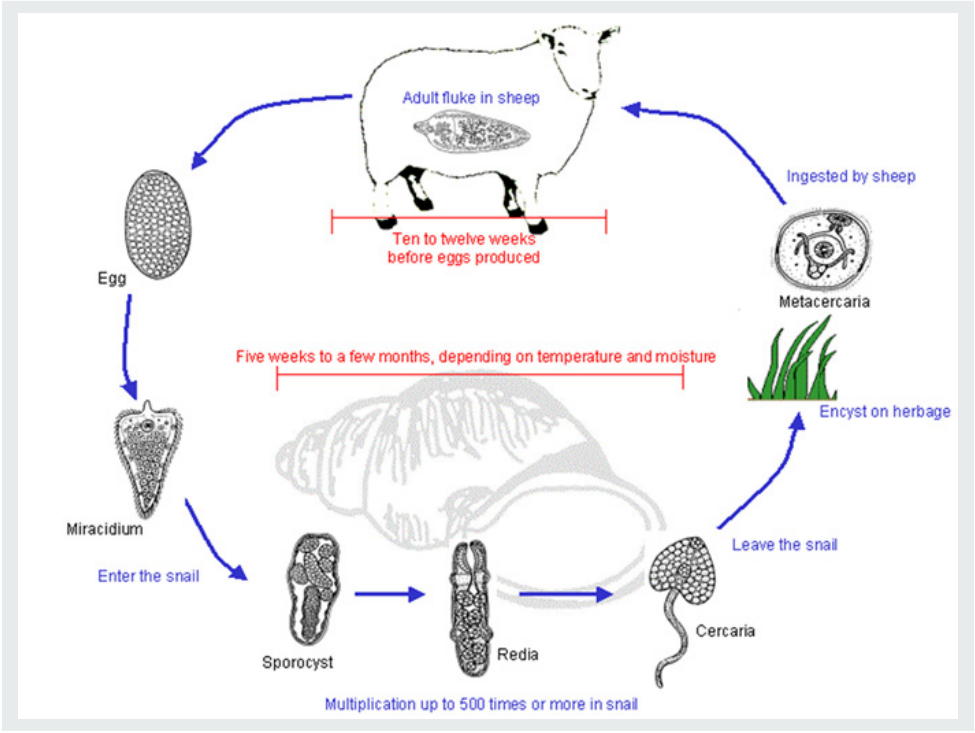


180° RIGHT TORSION 180° LEFT TORSION

Defending Livestock: Battling the Complex Life Cycle of Liver Fluke

As a wet July/August ends, we will now start to look ahead to winter. This time of the year is where fluke starts to come to the forefront of farmers and vet's minds alike. It is a parasite which is ideally suited to the English Autumn and Winter, as it loves wet ground.

The life cycle of Liver Fluke is complex.



The signs of chronic fluke are condition loss for all ruminants, poor fertility/milk production in dairy cows, weak calves & high perinatal deaths in spring calving herds and bottle jaw in sheep. Acute infections can cause sudden death, it is usually only in sheep that we see signs of Acute Disease. If you notice any of these, please get in contact with the office or your vet.

There are multiple different tests we can use to identify a fluke problem at various stages of disease. One of the most sensitive tests is postmortem inspection, by vets or in the abattoir. We can also send faecal or blood samples to the lab. At different times of year, depending on stage of the Liver Fluke life cycle, we might suggest different types of testing. If fluke is diagnosed or causing clinical signs in your herd, it would be beneficial to treat.

With blanket treatment common, we are trying to make more sustainable decisions and try to reduce our worming/fluke treatments. This is key to ensure we have effective products available for when we need them most. Diagnosing a fluke burden before treatment is gold standard before any treatment is given.

For a ruminant to become infected, it must ingest herbage with the immature fluke stage on it. The mud snail generally spends most of its time on boggy ground or near water courses. A good method of prevention, therefore, is to fence off any areas like this to reduce snail-ruminant contact.

A key point about the fluke life cycle is the delay in development into adults once ingested by the ruminant. The it takes about 6-8 weeks for the adults to form in the bile duct. Therefore, the immature fluke ingested can cause disease if in high enough numbers usually around late summer to autumn. The adult fluke develops and cause disease in winter and early spring.

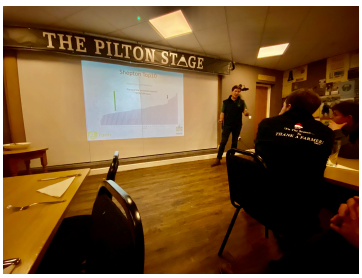
If a fluke burden has not been diagnosed but the history and clinical signs all fit the fluke checklist, then a discussion with your vet is crucial to ensure the correct product is used. Triclabendazole products are the only product which treat immature fluke. We need to ensure we protect this medication and use it sustainably. In a chronically infected animal, other products should be used. As with all worming or fluke products, using combination products when not required will only predisposed to resistance. Resistance does occur and is likely to become more prevalent on farms in the future if sustainable practices aren't followed.

- Harry Connock

All of our articles are available in full on our blog - check it out

We are delighted to invite you to join us at the Pilton Club this winter for supper and discussions on three new Shepton Top 10 topics. Once again, the Shepton Team will be exploring simple, measurable metrics that we believe represent high performance in herd health, efficiency, and sustainability.
This winter, our discussion group meetings will focus on: Genetics, Fertility and Youngstock Success

For those new to the Shepton Top Ten, we use real data from our Shepton dairy herds to highlight high performance and explore how you can improve metrics on your farm. We recognise all clients that reach our target, and one farm from each category will be crowned the 'Shepton Champion'. They will be invited to share with others how they achieved this.
On Tuesday 14th November Farm Vet Charlie will be leading our first meeting on Dairy Genetics. Charlie will explore how we can assess and improve our herds health through breeding.
Spaces are limited, so please contact the office to get your name on the list.



IBR review, how to know your disease status, ensuring good disease control

- Lottie Meire

As we head through autumn and towards winter housing, we are moving into the peak risk period for IBR (Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis). This is a viral disease that can spread rapidly between animals, particularly when they are coming into close contact in winter housing. It can cause a range of signs in cattle, from milk drop, poor growth rates and reduced fertility through to severe respiratory signs that can lead to death in the most severe cases.

Once infected, animals can carry the infection in their system even once recovered. These latently infected animals can shed the disease, continuing to infect other animals around them, as well as becoming ill themselves if stressed, for example after calving, housing, or transport. While it is relatively easy to spot the more severe respiratory signs, mild symptoms can be easy to overlook but even these can cause significant financial impact through reduced milk sales, delayed pregnancies/abortions, and reduced growth rates.

We can test for IBR in several ways; through bulk milk testing, blood sampling and nasal swabs. In clinical outbreaks swabs are often the quickest way to confirm the diagnosis, but it is important to regularly review you herd status even if you are not seeing obvious clinical signs.

Blood testing of youngstock cohorts and bulk tank testing should be carried out on a regular basis. Bulk tank testing tells us if you have significant levels of IBR infection within your adult herd, while youngstock testing is important to ensure that heifers can be vaccinated before they become infected.

Control and prevention of IBR revolves around biosecurity and vaccination is an effective way of boosting your biosecurity. Initial vaccination involves two injections between 1 and 6 months apart, followed by an annual booster. Heifers need to have their initial course before they go to the bull, to ensure that they are protected from fertility effects . Don't forget that any purchased animals also need to have a full initial course before they join the annual herd booster program.

If purchasing stock always look to buy from a herd with an accredited disease status, and if you regularly sell stock consider becoming accredited yourself. If you want to find out more about how to implement an effective IBR control program on your farm, or to discuss becoming an accredited herd then talk to your routine vet, or give the farm office a call.