

January 2022

Shepton Talking Sheep



Reducing lamb mortality at lambing time

We need to be thinking about preventing neonatal lamb disease way before lambs hit the ground. Did you know how well lambing went last year; did you record lamb mortality?

I cannot emphasise enough the importance of good ewe nutrition and correct body condition score (BCS). This is hopefully something that you monitor already in your flock throughout the sheep calendar.

It's simple- regular BCS at key times when you're handling the sheep (Clipping, Weaning, Topping, Scanning, Lambing). If you're not already condition scoring regularly scanning is a great time to start. Ewes can then be split into groups according to number of lambs carried, lates and those with a low BCS which will require extra care. If you've never BCS before, don't worry we are on hand to come and teach you how to carry out this important management tool.

Overall ewe nutrition should be reviewed well ahead of lambing time to ensure sufficient time to assess the ration, feed quality, feed access and the ability of ewes to achieve dry matter intakes. Forage analysis is a good place to start for those feeding conserved forage. Nutritional status should then be monitored as we get closer to lambing to ensure ewes are performing as expected. We can use blood samples to check adequate levels of protein and energy intakes 3-4 weeks pre lambing which gives us a little time to correct any shortfalls.

Nutrition effects many aspects of lamb survival both directly and indirectly. Both under and over nutrition can result in issues around lambing, these issues will impact colostrum and milk production, lamb viability, ewe lamb bond therefore impacting colostrum intake.

Colostrum is a non-negotiable, it is essential in preventing bacterial infections in the first few weeks of life through providing new-born lambs with the immunity, energy, and other nutrients for survival.

Finally, we should not overlook hygiene around lambing. This is the source of the bugs that lead to scour, joint ill, navel ill and watery mouth (Ecoli septicaemia). The environment the lamb is born into is vitally important as the more bugs that are around, the more chance the lamb picks them up. Areas should be well bedded, clean and dry. Take care to avoid overstocking. Feeding equipment should be cleaned and disinfected and dried well between each lamb. A contaminated feeding tube is a great way to

put bacteria straight into a lamb's stomach!

Over time, bacteria can build up as more animals move through the system, therefore it is vitally important to focus on keeping good hygiene measures up right until the end of lambing.

This year Spectam is unavailable. Although most farms have reduced or stopped using Spectam over the past few years with great success, there are still a few farms who do use and rely on this.

The lack of its availability should focus our attention even more on prevention of neonatal diseases such as watery mouth.

Rosie

We can help you be prepared

A pre-lambing visit allows us to review all the essential elements discussed above and more. If you have the data below, it is useful to review before we come for the visit. This visit allows us to identify key areas which need focus time and resources to deliver the best outcomes. We can also do ration analysis to ensure you're not over/under feeding your ewes.

Preparation is key to success, and this can look like many different things depending on your flock. Please get in touch with Rosie or Bibby if you are interested in finding out more.

Key Performance Indicators to record at lambing

Lambing percentage- Lambs born alive/ewes tupped x100

Abortion rate- Ewes aborted/ewes tupped x 100

Lambing interventions- Ewe requiring lambing intervention / total ewes lambed x 100

More information: Tally lamb and ewe losses at lambing time and record why!

All this information is vital to understand what is going well and what can be improved!

What to do if you have a sheep abortion?

1. Act fast! The earlier you determine the cause and treat other ewes, the more lambs that may be saved.
2. Isolate and mark the affected ewe.
- 3. Contact the Vets.**
4. Collect freshly aborted lambs and placentae if present; put in separate, clean bags and take to the Langford for diagnostics, or to the practice so we can collect the samples required.

Two or three will allow you to identify most of the possible infectious causes.

5. Most causes of abortion in sheep are **ZOONOTIC** so be careful when handling problem ewes & aborted material and always wash your hands afterwards. Pregnant women and children are particularly at risk so should avoid any contact with sheep/discharges.

6. Reduce stocking rates to lower the risk of infection.

7. Dispose of aborted material carefully and appropriately.

How many abortions is too many???

As a rule of thumb, if you experience three abortions in one day, or one a day for a few days.

Please don't suffer in silence, we are here to help at this stressful time.

Rosie

Getting your vaccines organised around lambing



With lambing around the corner, we want to make sure our ewe's immune system is fully prepared. There are several vaccines that we can use around lambing.

Heptavac P Plus helps to protect Sheep from various clostridial diseases, which usually cause sudden death, as well as helping control pneumonia pasteurellosis.

Heptavac P Plus is a very cost-effective vaccine to be utilized in your flock vaccine schedule. As well as protecting the ewes, if this vaccine is given at an appropriate time during gestation. Lambs will also receive protection from these infections; provided the lamb receives sufficient immune colostrum in the first 1-2 days of life.

The optimum time for vaccinating ewes during pregnancy is 4-6 weeks prior to lambing. All ewes if they haven't previously been vaccinated need a full course. This is two doses, 4-6 weeks apart. The vaccines should be given under the skin in the lateral side of the upper neck. Making sure you are using clean vaccinating equipment.

The immunity provided to the lamb via the ewes colostrum although provides good protection to the new born lamb, this immunity does begin to wane, it is important to

ensure that growing lambs, later in the season are not lost to the common clostridial diseases mentioned above. These lambs should be started on their own vaccination course with Heptavac P Plus. This vaccination program cannot be started until lambs are at least 3 weeks old. These lambs also need two doses of the vaccines to ensure the best protection from disease.

The other vaccine to mention is to protect against ORF. The vaccine is called Scabivax Forte. This is a live vaccine that provides immunization of sheep and lambs to reduce the clinical signs and lesions seen with ORF. Unfortunately, if the ewes are vaccinated, they do not provide the lambs any protection against ORF via the colostrum. Ewes needs to be vaccinated a minimum of 7 weeks before they are brought to the lambing location. This is because we do not want the vaccine scabs to fall off and contaminate the lambing environment. As the vaccine is live and could cause disease in the lambs. Lambs and ewes are vaccinated with 0.02ml by skin scarification using the specific scabivax forte applicator, the vaccine should be administered in the arm pit. Lambs can be vaccinated from birth. Immunity takes 4-8 weeks to develop and last for at least 12 months.

We would recommend all sheep producers to vaccinate with Heptavac P Plus, however, Scabivax Forte, we would only recommend using if you have previously had ORF diagnosed on your farm.

Vaccination plans can be completed to ensure all doses are given at the optimum time, if you would like help coordinating a vaccine calendar please contact the practice to discuss with one of the vets.

Bibby



DON'T FORGET...

We have a purpose-built facility for sheep and goats at the practice. Bringing your animal to us will save you a call-out fee, as well as ensure access to specialized equipment including a surgical table, heat lamp, and the ability to perform advanced procedures that are otherwise unsuitable to do on-farm.