

A word from our Directors - Charlie Neale

This month we were joined for an afternoon by Andrew Curwen, Chief Executive of XLVets (and who as a student saw practice with Shepton in the 1980's!); a well-timed visit considering Andrew's position within a community of independently owned practices, in a month with widely publicised attention on vet practices from the competition and markets authority (CMA).

When discussing this matter with Andrew, it was clear that the independent practices (by this, we generally mean businesses that are owned by the people that work within the practice and who turn up to your farm) that make up XLVets are generally not the focus of this investigation as we are somewhat the antithesis of the: "Concentrated local markets, in part driven by sector consolidation, may be leading to weak competition in some areas and Large corporate groups may have incentives to act in ways which reduce choice and weaken competition" that are in the spotlight.

Being a member of XLVets gives us the ability to compete with these types of practices, by using a strength-in-numbers approach, whilst keeping the advantage of not having to manage our business to the desire of external shareholders. Andrew's visit highlighted the importance of putting client care at the forefront of a vet's business, which we always strive to do, and we will always value any feedback you have to help us improve.



FIND OUT MORE -
<http://rb.gy/nxc6p5>

Bovine TB: Consultation on proposals to evolve badger control policy and introduce additional cattle measures

Defra's consultation on wildlife control and its role in bovine TB eradication is now open. It is important that we get farmers and vets voices heard in this important consultation. Please follow the link below and complete if you are able to before the 22nd April.



Vet Tech fly control services

Fly parasites, buckets and boards will be available this summer, contact Jamie at the practice if you would like to know more.

On farms that used our tech services in 2023 we observed lower usage of ophthalmic antibiotics (less bad eyes) and received feedback from both farmers and vets about significantly reduced fly-bother in cattle on these farms. It is worth noting that all fly control (including use of pour-on repellent) should be AHEAD of observing high fly numbers, as it's crucial to limit the hatch-out rather than deal with large numbers when they are already present. Please feel free to contact us about the pricing of pour-on (Spotinor) as well as the tech fly control services.

MEDS UPDATES

Huskvac: Healthy supply available, don't forget just over 3 months left of the Huskvac season to get your order in.

Spirovac: We are holding Spirovac in stock so available to order.

Bovela & Bovilis BVD: We are holding in stock and available to order.

Pen & Strep: Unfortunately, this has had another slip in supply, we are now out of stock until mid-late April.

NEW PRODUCT AVAILABLE

Cyclex: This disinfectant is clinically proven to kill cryptosporidium and coccidiosis oocysts, making it a very good choice for use in calf pens. There are very few disinfectants that are proven to kill these bugs.

New farm Meds Collection Point in Wells

Available now we are offering a farm meds daily collection point at our Wells Surgery, available every weekday. Same day collections for orders received before 9am. Orders received before 9 will be at Wells for collection from 10:30am on that same day!

Don't forget you can order all your vaccines and all regular orders via WhatsApp or Text message on **07592 307394**

The Shepton Top 10 Round Up - Rosie Lyle

Another winter discussion group season is now behind us, and once again, we've seen lots of top performances in our Shepton herds.

Our first meeting was on genetics. Vet Charlie led the discussions, and all our herds were benchmarked on £PLI or £ACI. The big takeaway was understanding your herd's genetic baseline and then setting some breeding goals that suit your herd. The AHDB herd genetic report is a great place to start. Our Shepton Top10 Champion for genetics was Chris Dunn; both his milking herd and youngstock are in the top 5% for £PLI when benchmarked against the UK Holstein herd. We have some new analysis tools to assess your herd's genetic performance and an opportunity to dip a toe into genomic testing through a discounted 20-cow screen. Please speak to your herd vet for more details on this one.

Fertility is key to performance, and this was the topic of our second discussion group led by Paddy and Rob, who benchmarked the fertility performance in our AYR and Block calving herds. AYR herds this time were ranked and given a bronze, silver, or gold status. Paddy used Preg Rate as a tool to do the final benchmark, but we dove into lots of interesting fertility metrics along the way.

Shepton Gold Herds achieved 68% of cows submitted for service by 80 days, compared to 55% of cows submitted by 80 days. Detecting 3-week returns was also much higher for gold-performing herds compared to bronze. Almost 60% of our herds are now using activity monitors for heat detection, some very successfully and others not so well. The average conception of the gold group was 50%, with the top herd being 63%. Our AYR fertility champion was Greens at Court Barn, with an average PR of 27%.



The Shepton block herd's average block length was 12 weeks. The average conception rate was 54%, with the highest being 64%. The 3-week submission average was 80%, with the highest being 90%. Getting cows and heifers in calf at the start of the block was the key take-home message to drive performance and reduce the empty rate. Be proactive, carry out pre-mating heat detection, and act early with fertility treatments if required. Our top-ten block fertility winner was The Garretts at White House Farm.

Heifers' fertility performance within the herd is a barometer for youngstock performance. Youngstock vets Anna and Rosie led the final discussions. We used age at first calving (AFC) as our benchmark metric, as well as % survival to lactation. The lowest AFC was 23 months, and the oldest was 3.5 years. The Shepton median AFC is 787d (25.8 months), which is lower than the national median AFC of 799d (26.2 months).

Most research agrees that the optimum AFC is between 22 and 25 months, inclusive. An AFC below and above this range can reduce first 305-day lactation and lifetime milk yields, fertility, and chances of surviving to a second lactation, along with a lower economic return. These animals must grow and meet liveweight targets through their rearing period to be successful in reaching the AFC target at calving and surviving. Congratulations to our youngstock champion, the Millers, at Evercreech Park Farm. Well done to all the Shepton Top10 winners this year.

USING THE MORRIS REMOTE CONTROL HYDRAULIC YOKE FOR TB TESTING.

- Ralph Drouin

We used a client's new Morris Remote Control hydraulic yoke set up for his recent herd test. There are two remote control yokes at the end of a race leading off from a new rotary parlour, as in the letter 'Y'. Each yoke is operated by a wireless handheld device, which has 4 options: open/close yoke and open/close (rear) gate. The distance between the yoke and the rear gate is long enough to hold a cow, standing free behind the yoke and in front of the rear gates. One operator controlled each yoke whilst Ray tested cows on their left side in the left-hand crush and I tested them on the right in the right hand one. APHA insists, when two people are testing at the same place and time, that each tester reads 'their' cows on day 2. Injecting on day 1 was straightforward but as always when clipping, etc, it can help if someone stands in front of the cow so the neck can be accessed behind the yoke. After testing both groups of milkers, we had both done about the same number, much to our mutual surprise as we both thought the other had tested many more! On day 2, we used one crush with Ray and I standing on our respective sides.

We had expected to identify who had tested which cows by looking to see if they were clipped on the left or right sides, but it was much easier when Ray's cows had been identified by a vertical red stripe over the shoulder. I prefer not to restrain cows by the neck on day 2 as frequently the injection sites are obstructed by the yoke, but because they were being vaccinated, this was not possible. We were all impressed by how smoothly the set up worked, I found it all quite stress free, as I think our client must have judging by the wide grin on his face whenever I looked up!



Whilst on my visits I have been having several discussions about clients imminent lambing.

I've had frequent conversations about the prevalence of Schmallenberg following on from some of the earlier lambers and spring calvers reporting cases of deformed lambs and calves. Schmallenberg is a viral infection of ruminants and camelids that affects the nervous system of the unborn animal, as a result we can see deformed limbs, which can make delivery difficult, often resulting in damage to the dam. If you are struggling to lamb a ewe, it is worth remembering we have facilities at the practice where you can bring the ewe straight to us, saving you the cost of a call out fee, we have a fixed fee for a sheep caesareans to help with economic considerations. If you have any deformed lambs born, APHA are gathering information on Schmallenberg so will test these lambs free of charge. Please discuss with the practice about arranging this.

In addition sheep farmers are being encouraged to fill in this survey <https://rb.gy/wuva7m> to help understand the impact of Schmallenberg on the national flock.

Fat Hogg trade is currently very agreeable! Prices in market at the beginning of March peaked at 368p/kg. Hopefully this trade continues, and we can maximize profits on our 2024 lamb crop. Spectam an oral antibiotic was used routinely by many sheep producers, to prophylactically dose all lambs at birth as an aid to reducing the chances of developing E.coli infections such as watery mouth. In 2022 Spectam was withdrawn from the market, it was certainly considered by many farmers a nerve-racking time – would this have a negative effect on lamb mortality? A study assisted by AHDB found no link between antibiotic usage and improved health and productivity in lambs.

One of the ways of reducing the risk of a lamb developing Watery Mouth is to ensure that lambs receive adequate colostrum. Much like we see in the cattle sector there is considerable variation in the degree of Failure of Passive Transfer (a measure as to whether a lamb has had enough colostrum) in lambs. One study found that 14% of clinically normal lambs demonstrated some failure of passive transfer (FPT), whilst 46% of lambs dying of natural causes between 24 hours and 5 weeks of age had FPT.

FPT is a significant risk of death in lambs, 45% of lambs with FPT died before 3 weeks of age, whereas only 5% of lambs with adequate passive transfer died before 3 weeks of age.



What can we do to reduce the risk of FPT and subsequent increased risk of death in our lambs. We can ensure that we optimise our chances of our ewes producing sufficient colostrum in the first place.

- Ensuring our ewes are in good BCS before lambing, appropriate nutrition means that a ewe has sufficient energy and protein to produce sufficient colostrum, it will also mean optimum placental development for good sized lambs.
- Inadequate pre lambing nutrition (protein and energy) results in reduced colostrum yield and quality, it also reduces the mothering ability of the ewe.
- It's important that if we are giving our lambs colostrum, we give them enough. Lambs should receive at least 10% of their body weight in the first 24 hours. We should give them 50ml/kg BW per feed to ensure sufficient colostrum is given. For example, a typically 5kg single needs at least 500ml in the first 24 hours but can handle 250ml in an initial feed.

If you wanted to review your ewe feeding, we could blood sample 10 animals around 3 weeks before lambing and assess BCS. The bloods would indicate whether Energy and or Protein levels were adequate. If you were interested, then we utilise your Animal Health and Welfare Funding to pay for your visit.

Vet Tech News

Vet Tech Jade has been a key part of the Shepton Vets farm team since 2021. A key part of Jade's work is organising and carrying out vaccinations on the vaccine round. This round now has more than 30 farms on it, each week Jade visits these farms administering pneumonia, ringworm and scour prevention vaccines.

"Our vaccination round can really help on busy farms. Farmers benefit from the scheme by vaccinating calves at the time when their vaccines are due without wasting any doses. We aim to plan a visit in advance where possible, but when not possible, we simply send a message the day before requesting calf ear tag numbers. We then visit the farm and vaccinate the calves for the farmers, providing an efficient service that doesn't require the farmer to help. Farms can be assured that the calves are vaccinated whilst they can focus on other tasks."

- Vet tech Jade

Shepton Vet Techs also offer a stress free disbudding service, body condition and mobility scoring, udder singeing and we are just about to start our fly control service.

Surgical Audit – What have we been up to?

Harry Connock

What is an audit?

A process of collecting data in a specific area of practice. In our case, this is all surgeries performed by our vets. We have been collating information since July 2022. Castrations and disbuds/dehorns were not included.

How do we collect the data?

We collect the data on a paper spreadsheet in the vet's office.

What is recorded?

Client and animal details are recorded, as well as type of surgery and outcome. These are crudely recorded as survivability at 1 day, 1 week and 1-month post-surgery.

Why do we audit?

Auditing is crucial to understand the real data for our specific practice about the overall success of surgeries on our farms. This means we can compare to benchmarks and discover where we can improve.

What are the results?

Well, this is the tricky part. Getting a robust method of recording can be challenging. It can be hard to record all surgeries, but it is especially hard to get the follow up data. Remembering to speak to a farmer 1 month after a surgery to see if it is alive and well is a crux of the system. We need good quality reliable data to be able to draw useful conclusions.

Here is some information that has been recorded so far:

- 179 surgeries performed, of which 84 were caesarean sections, 67 were LDA corrections. The rest were made up of enucleations, RDA corrections, hernia repairs and one cyst removal.
- Of the 67 LDA corrections, 38 were using our laparoscopic technique, 18 were toggled and 11 were surgically corrected.
- Of recorded data, we have a 89% survival rate of all surgeries to 1 month post operation.

Preliminary findings show good results for all our surgeries performed at Shepton Vets, especially considering this includes some RDAs which carry a poorer prognosis. It shows us that lots of farms are adopting the laparoscopic correction of LDAs.

What will we do from here?

We need to improve our recording and monitoring of outcomes. We will start checking all surgeries have been recorded at the end of each month by cross checking the audit against work booked. We will then continue to gather more data and as we increase our dataset we will be able to report back to you with a more detailed analysis of outcomes.

Team news

Anna Hares (old Anna!) has now returned from maternity leave and is enjoying being on farm again.



Introducing Jade

Job Title: Customer Service and Data Administrator

What did you do before? I worked in a Veterinary Practice in wells as a Receptionist/Pet Co-Ordinator.

Why did you want to do this job? I've always loved farm animals as well as small animals, I grew up visiting a family members farm and loved helping out.

What do you like best about it? being first contact when clients need me, it's always lovely when clients come to pick up medication I can have a chat and get to know them and they get to know me.

Favourite animal and why? Cats, they offer companionship, unconditional love, entertainment, affection and very independent.

Do you have any pets? A Cat called Mildred

Favourite biscuit? My favourite biscuit is a Custard cream with a nice cup of tea.

Interesting fact about you? I'm Kind, Caring, Artistic, always making people laugh, and Very Loyal.



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Office Opening Hours Monday-Friday: 8am - 5:30pm
Saturday: 8:30am - 12:30pm