

A word from our Directors - Paddy Gordon

The practice continues to grow and now has over 54,000 cattle to look after. We welcome all farm clients whether large dairy, smallholder or all types in between. We believe our continued growth is not down to our size or farm size but the level of care given and received. We are working hard to look after you but have also diversified with teams to carry out TB testing, technician work, teaching and export work. This growth and additional work creates new opportunities for vets to join the business. We want to continue to build a practice that is locally owned, as we think the best people to make decisions are those who work within it. From July Rob Powell will become a Director and Bibby Thomas and Rosie Lyle will become Associate Directors at Shepton Vets. Committing their futures to the practice gives you continuity, with both a familiar face and experienced vets. Paddy Gordon will continue working in a part time clinical role but is stepping down from management of the practice. Paddy will still be available to help the management team should it be required. We welcome Elly Cockman as a new vet and replacement for Emily in June. Elly is joining us after 3 years in west Wales and we are confident will soon settle into the practice and area.



Shepton vets sponsored the Young Farmers Rally at the Bath and West last weekend. Bibby was providing vet cover to the event, lots of great animals on display. Well done to all the clubs of Wessex Young Farmers Group for all your hard work!



Johnes review season is fast approaching

as part of the NJMP you should be regularly testing your herd for Johnes disease. Please ensure you are up to date with your testing regime and Sam will be in touch soon to book in your annual Johnes review.

PAPERLESS INVOICES

We are running an initiative over the next few months to reduce the amount of paper, printing and postage costs. Maria in our accounts department will be in touch to see if you would be happy receiving invoices by email in the future.

Summer Scour Syndrome

- Bibby Thomas

This is a condition typically seen in young heifer calves, 6-9 months old. Animals in their first grazing season are usually affected towards the end of summer. The morbidity can be high, with up to 40% of a group showing clinical signs.

Cases present as an unresponsive, profuse, watery scour that doesn't respond to worming or coccidiosis treatment. Affected heifers will test negative for Gut worms, Coccidiosis, Salmonellosis, Yersiniosis, BVD, MCF and IBR.

Postmortems have found that these animals, have oral and oesophageal ulceration and necrosis.

Although the exact cause is not 100% understood, current best advice for reducing the risk of Summer Scour Syndrome is to manage young calves well at turn out. Hence the timing of this article! Guidance is summarised to the right.

- Make sure you have a good control plan in place to prevent common causes of scour such as Worms, Cocci and concurrent bacterial infections. Some investigations have found animals with a high coccidiosis count are more likely to develop this syndrome.
- Try and transition calves onto a grass-based diet before turnout. Feed hay or silage ahead of turnout rather than straw and cake to allow this transition.
- Turn out onto stemmy, older grass, rather than onto pastures high in nitrogen. Interestingly, grazing is a learned activity, so for a suckled calf, this is learnt easily from its mother. Dairy heifer replacements might not be grazing properly at the beginning of turnout.
- It also might be of benefit to leave some of the housing ration in the field initially whilst calves transition onto grazing.

We've had what feels like a very long winter, I'm sure you are all looking forward to turning everything out. If you would like some assistance with devising a grazing plan that prevents parasite build up on pasture, please contact Bibby or Rosie.

Choosing sire in your suckler herd will greatly impact its profitability. This makes decisions around the breed and the individual within it very important. The sire's contribution to the herd output or replacements is likely to be felt for years to come, which means the consequences for choosing badly can be costly in time, labour and finances.

What factors should you consider when choosing the right bull for your suckler cows? There are a number to take into consideration, which could mean the difference between a strong profit and a significant loss.

Choosing your breed;

Traditionally, the breed choice will depend on what market you are looking to sell to:

- Are you aiming to finish cattle yourselves? Do you want to finish grazing or housed? What is your outlet? Processor or farm shop? What carcass does the butcher/consumer want?
- Will you sell at store markets? Buyers will often prefer a large, fast growing, well-muscled terminal sire.
- If selling into breed-branded retail markets, their choice of sire is restricted to specific breeds.
- If selling into the heifer replacement markets, the most appropriate sire will be one that usually delivers attractive easy calving females.

This last point is particularly important but can be an afterthought to the beef herd. Sire choice goes wrong and results in inefficient, unprofitable beef production.

From a financial point of view, selecting a sire with strong maternal genetics makes sense, traditionally this has not happened. Historically we have seen the use of large, terminal continental breeds on dairy cows to produce replacement heifers, which has led to inefficiencies in the British beef industry.

There are many reasons for this; these bigger cows need more feed to reach target weights, which puts feed costs up per animal. Bigger cows mean a lower stocking density is needed at grass, and both combined means the return on each animal is usually reduced.

We have also seen these cows bred to large sires also experience more birth difficulties due to the size of the calves. Not only does this present with the more obvious cost of a vet visit to the calving or caesarean but those that do come out on farm maybe slow to start, meaning reduced colostrum intake and subsequent problems with disease, diarrhoea, pneumonia and lost growth potential as well as higher calf mortality rate. Also, the cows can take longer than to get back in calf.

Large sires also suffer health problems and are generally expensive to feed and maintain, in turn this may lead to substandard fertility decreasing the overall profitability of the herd still further.

Thankfully, these perceptions around size are gradually starting to change, as we look for a small strong calf out of an easy calving cow that gets up, sucks and grows well and efficiently, producing an easily worked carcass.

There is growing interest in composite breeds, for example the Stabiliser, with strong maternal traits and good finishing qualities and hybrid vigour, they sell as the perfect heifer replacements and produce high-quality finished carcasses.

Then there are the breed branded schemes with Angus, Hereford, Shorthorn, Wagyu, British Blue to name a few.

Once you've chosen your breed, how do you select the best bull for your farm?

Research the bull, bulls' parents, and grandparent EBVS together with a good physical appearance and fit to work conformation.

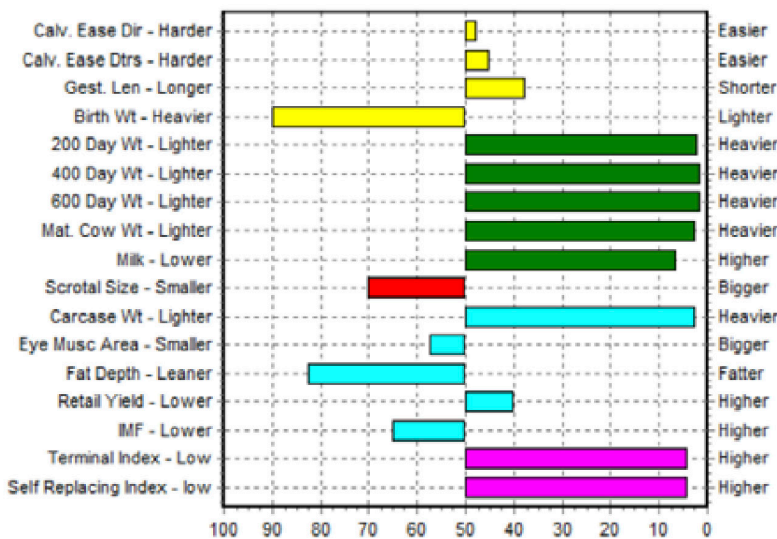
All breed societies who performance record have easy access to EBV information through their society websites, and EBV information can also be accessed through individual animal pages on the websites of AI companies. Information on EBVs is presented both in graphs and using numerical figures.

Above-average EBVs are shown on the right-hand side of the graph and below-average EBVs on the left-hand side of the graph.

A bull with a birth weight EBV of -2 is expected, on average, to produce calves 1 kg lighter at birth than calves sired by a bull with an EBV of 0.

Whilst the example here shows ever so slightly positive EBV for calving ease, when we look at the accuracy of this info it is lower compared to the average calf weight which is significantly heavier, and therefore negative, as is likely to lead to calving problems. This bull also has a smaller scrotal size which may not be good for fertility. It does, however, have great growth rates, and terminal index, so if matched with good cows e.g. a larger framed/different breed may be a good success, this is not the bull to use on heifers! They have to come out alive and thriving to grow well in the first place so we would always recommend an easy calving lower birth weight calf on EBVs.

When going to market or society sale it becomes easier to compare a larger number and find the best that suits your needs, however, always remember conformation which is not accounted for by EBVS (directly) you do have to buy with your eyes too, after the paperwork research. Good working bulls need good leg conformation, and strong backs so they can withstand a lot of work.



Fertility - many society sales and private breeders will have bulls fertility tested prior to sale. This involves a vet visit to assess physical appearance of the bull as a whole, genital tract, scrotal size, health, collection of semen and evaluation of concentration, motility and morphology under the microscope, allowing thorough evaluation of the bulls fertility status.

We can do this for you once your bull is home if it has not been done. It should be noted that any interruption to spermatogenesis may take around 6 weeks to become apparent or recover so it is important that your bull is bought, assessed and settled in well before the breeding period.

	Calving Ease DIR (%)	Calving Ease DTRS (%)	Gestation Length (days)	Birth Wt. (kg)	200 Day Wt (kg)	400 Day Wt (kg)	600 Day Wt (kg)	Mat Cow Wt (kg)	Milk (kg)	Scrotal Size (cm)	Carcase Wt (kg)	Eye Muscle Area (sq cm)	Fat Depth (mm)	Retail Beef Yield (%)	IMF (%)
EBV	-1.2	+0.5	+0.4	+5.1	+63	+103	+126	+118	+18	+0.6	+80	+3.2	-2.2	+1.1	0.0
Acc	50%	44%	51%	78%	72%	72%	67%	59%	51%	74%	61%	54%	61%	54%	50%

Disease and parasites wise it is always useful to know the disease status of the source herd, CHECS accreditation for Johnes, BVD, IBR, Lepto, Neospora, and TB is possible and usually advertised if present. Some of these may only be monitoring and represent still some negative risk to a herd. Where there is no accreditation, we can advise on the best tests to ask for before purchase, or to do upon arrival on your farm whilst your bull is settled in isolation. This is an important time for observation and maintenance of condition as he adapts to your farm if he is to be at peak fertility for use after isolation. We can also, with the vendors consent ask to speak to the source herds Vet to ascertain health status or previous vaccination which help us determine the best and most cost-effective testing to do. We always find this useful, as sometimes we find the information available may be misunderstood. Some vaccines can be a great alarm bell for signs of out-of-control disease on a farm.

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If you would like further information on choosing your bull or accessing/interpreting EBVS please pick up the phone or ask on a visit, I can also recommend from AHDB the excellent resource https://projectblue.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/Beef%20&%20Lamb/ChoosingBullsBR_201109_WEB.pdf



DIY AI TRAINING

We had a full AI course last week, with use of the training cow and lots of live cows, our keen delegates had many cervixes to get their hands on. Our final assessment involved inseminating cows with a straw of Sudocrem, on previous courses we have used lube but the Sudocrem had the advantage as it showed up much more clearly on the ultrasound scan. We will follow up with all participants in the coming weeks and offer further support where necessary.

In case you were wondering this was a cow AI course, there were some goats on farm on the 3rd day which were very popular!

Thanks to the farms that provided cows for this training.

Mobility scoring results update - Ray Creed

Since joining the practice in 2020 I have been doing mobility scoring as a RoMS qualified scorer. We now have 24 herds we score regularly. Some are scored monthly, most are quarterly, some are 6 monthly and a couple have an annual check. Over the past 4 years we have seen considerable improvement in lameness rates across the scored herds. The table shows the percentage of lame cows in each herd and clearly shows a reduction across the board.

Mobility scoring plays a key part in monitoring and identifying lameness. Some herds have blips along the way usually due to staffing issues, but these are quickly found and hopefully dealt with. Our monthly scored herds usually work with a trimmer so that they are scored one day, and then lame cows looked at the next day.

FARM	2020	2022	2024	DIFF
A	11	7.5	6	-5
B	8.8	8.7	4	-4.4
C	5	4.6	3.2	-1.8
D	9	7	3.8	-5.2
E	N/A	4	2	-2
F	N/A	6	4	-2
G	N/A	6.3	2.9	-3.4
H	13	6.7	3.5	-9.5
I	10	7.5	4.7	-5.3
J	13	4.4	5	-8
K	14	13	11	-3
L	11	13	11	0
M	25	19.3	14	-11
N	N/A	5.5	2.3	-3.2
O	N/A	12	10.5	-1.5
P	N/A	18	8.5	-9.5
Q	N/A	8.5	6	-2.5
R	16	8.7	5.8	-10.2

****PLEASE NOTE IF YOU WANT TO PRINT THIS INFORMATION, CHOOSE 'FIT TO PAGE' TO PRINT ON A SINGLE SHEET****

HERD MOBILITY AND LAMENESS RECORDING SHEET

FARM	FRED
DATE	17.4.24
SCORER	R.CREED RC966

Score 3		Score 2		Cows Total	Score 3 Total	Score 2 Total	Score 0/1 Total
Number	Limb	Number	Limb	200	1	19	180
65	LF	1621	LH				
		765	RH				
		373	RH				
		112	LH				
		34	RH				
		1145	LH				
		545	RH				
		576	RH				
		21	LH				
		98	RH				
		6	LH				
		345	RH				
		876	RH				
		421	RH				
		953	RH				
		371	LH				
		6938	RF				
		55	LF				

Score 3 %	Score 2 %	Score 0/1 %
0.5	9.5	90.0

LAMENESS	LH	RH	LF	RF
Score 3	0	0	1	0
Score 2	6	10	1	1
Total	6	10	2	1

LAME ON LAST 3 SCORES

LAME ON LAST 2 SCORES

Latest mobility score result
17.4.24 10.00%

Previous mobility score results
10.1.24 8.00%
12.10.23 16.00%
14.7.23 4.00%

Herd Mobility Score Category %

Lameness % by limb

On our report we track the cows so that any repeat offenders are highlighted. Unresolved cases and persistently lame cows can easily build up which can lead to a high percentage on your mobility score. If lame cows are either cured or culled, then lameness rates improve rapidly.

We score either as cows enter the collection yard or as they leave the parlour. Robot herds are walked around but either way it is done at no inconvenience to the farmer. Body condition scoring can also be done at the same time. Many herds only score initially to meet contract requirements but quickly see the benefits.

Improved out-of-hours call handling

We have some positive feedback about our improved out-of-hours call handling. We now rely on our small animal night nursing team to answer the phones 90% of the time (we need to use a call centre for short handover periods). This means you are talking to someone with animal health experience who works at Shepton Vets. We like to keep it local!

New prescribing rules on wormers and flea treatments for pets

New prescribing rules on wormers and flea treatments for pets have come into effect this year. For us to be able to supply you with flea and worm treatments for your cats and dogs, a vet needs to have carried out a physical examination of them. Appropriate use of flea and worm treatments should be discussed and documented. To ensure you aren't refused medicines at our small animal desk (as rules require) we will record your pets' details and examine them as necessary when carrying out your herd health plan. We can then put these details on our computer system allowing you to collect flea and wormer treatments without seeing a vet.

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.

Upcoming Training Courses

MAY 22nd 2024

Foot Trimming course
"A thoroughly worthwhile course for anyone that may have to deal with hoofcare on farm!"
- Charlie Neale



July 17th 2024

Calving and Down Cow course
"This course encompasses a combination of theory and practical sessions designed to empower farmers to manage calving cows and downed animals with confidence."
- Bibby Thomas



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