WORKING TOGETHER FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE

SPRING EDITION 2010

Livestock MATTERS

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Inside ths issue:

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Precaution is better than cure

Be proactive - not reactive - towards safety...

XLVets Sterimatic Packs...

The XLVets Sterimatic needle protector and cleaning system provides ultimate operator safety along with a sterile system for multi-dose injections.

The XLVets Sterimatic system has many aspects which are extremely beneficial for both the user and livestock. These include protecting the needle from damage, whilst reducing infection and abscessing. It also reduces the chances of cross-infection of disease between livestock and most importantly reduces the risk of self-injection.

The Sterimatic system comprises of two parts; a sleeve which protects the needle to help prevent self-injection and keep the needle clean and a 'Stericap' which swabs the needle with disinfectant before and after injecting each animal.

The Stericap is proven to be effective against many viral and bacterial contaminants including; Foot and Mouth disease, Bluetongue, Staphylococcus, E.Coli and PRRSv.

The XLVets Sterimatic sleeve is compatible with most plastic multi-dose syringes. Each pack contains 1 sleeve, 5 Stericaps and 5 needles. Refill packs are also available. To order contact your XLVets practice.

XLVets
Excellence in Practice

XLVets Product. For more information and products please refer to the XLVets Livestock Catalogue.

For further information on XLVets and its member practices please contact the XLVets office on (01228) 711788 or e-mail admin@xlvets.co.uk.

www.xlvets.co.uk

SPRING EDITION

XLVets is a novel and exciting initiative conceived from within the veterinary profession. We are all independently owned, progressive veterinary practices located throughout the United Kingdom committed to working together for the benefit of our clients.

XLVets Member Practices

608 Vet Group
Allen and Partners
Alnorthumbria Veterinary Group
Ardene House Veterinary Hospital
Belmont Veterinary Centre
Bishopton Veterinary Group
Cain Vet Centre
Calweton Veterinary Practice
Castle Veterinary Surgeons
Chapelfield Veterinary Partnership
Cliffe Veterinary Group
Clyde Veterinary Group
Drove Veterinary Hospital
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Wright & Morten

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THE EDITOR

Welcome to the 'new look' XLVets farm magazine...

The magazine may have a different appearance and a new name, but it promises to continue to provide practical, educational articles for our farm clients, across the UK.

The magazine will now have regular features in each issue including; a 'pull-out and keep' guide to a common disease/ ailment; providing useful practical information that can be kept to hand and also regular updates on the XLVets recently launched FarmSkills.

We'll also continue to feature farm health planning case studies - practical, real-life situations where farmer/vet partnerships and initiatives have helped improve health and productivity on livestock farms. In this issue we take a look at the BVD eradication programme on Orkney and speak to some of those farmers involved. This is an excellent example of collaboration between farmers and their vet; by working together significant results were achieved.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the new 'Livestock Matters'.

Joanne Dodgson
XLVets

CONTENTS

XLVETS WELCOMES ITS 43RD MEMBER PRACTICE:

Parklands Veterinary Group

Based in the heart of Northern Ireland, Parklands Veterinary Group delivers its services throughout the province. With a simple philosophy of **'being good at what you do'**, the demand for their services has seen the practice grow rapidly over the past ten years.

Led by the team of Partners:

Jim Slaine *MVB MRCVS*

Ian Stewart *BVMS MRCVS*
(currently President of AVSPNI)

John Grant *BVSc MRCVS*

Craig McAlister *MVB MRCVS*

Andrew Turkington *MA Vet MB MRCVS*

The team of 20 vets cover all species from their three centres in Aughnacloy, Cookstown and Dungannon.

Offering a wide range of services from embryo transfer to routine Pet Health Checks the staff have all been involved in delivering veterinary services to the highest standards.

Growth has enabled specialisation in many areas, one of which is a busy equine complex focused on fertility work and AI every spring under the guidance of Jim Slaine.

As well as being situated in one of the most densely populated cattle regions of Europe the close proximity of the practice to both the main pig and poultry operations in the province has enabled Ian Stewart (Poultry) and John Grant (Pigs) to develop these services to the extent that the practice is now delivering services across all of Northern Ireland to these sectors.

Education continues to be a focal point for the practice, both from ongoing CPD for the veterinary surgeons to regular conferences and workshops for clients. In 2009 over 1,000 farm delegates attended at least one of the three major conferences run by the practice or the smaller workshop/evening meetings on offer.

Education is completed by the training of Veterinary Nurses and opportunities for all staff from receptionists to field advisers to achieve qualification to SQP status, with currently 10 members of staff across the three sites holding SQP qualifications in relation to farm animals.

Recent recruitments have seen specialist vets Rosanna Wregor (Pigs) and Professor Daniel Barry (ET) join the veterinary team.

parklands
VETERINARY GROUP

Practice management falls under the stewardship of David Mulligan B Agr Dip Agr Comm CVP SQP who in conjunction with the dedicated team of lay staff delivers a level of service to clients which is second to none. This was highlighted in 2009, when David was recognised as the VBJ Veterinary Practice Manager of The Year.

With increasing challenges presenting themselves to the veterinary profession from all sides, the addition of Parklands Veterinary Group to XLVets brings exciting opportunities to all and further strengthens the provision of veterinary services throughout the UK market.

XLVets trains its trainers

XLVets recently launched a 'Train the Trainer' programme aimed at veterinary surgeons to improve their delivery of training and assist them with the provision of XLVets FarmSkills training courses to farm clients.

The Train the Trainer course is a practical training course that covers:

- Planning effective training
- Understanding how adults learn
- Being aware of the communication tools that are available and what works best
- Knowing which training style should be used in different circumstances
- Practical tools for assessment

The course is split in two; beginning with an initial intensive two day training course that provides a comprehensive set of tools and instructional techniques for the construction and delivery of effective training. After completing this, there is then the option to attend the second, three day course, that provides certification for those attending, to enable them to deliver those FarmSkills courses accredited by LANTRA Awards.

Since July 2009, 62 XLVets members have attended the two day course and 23 members have already gone on to attend and pass the final 3 day course to become LANTRA Awards approved trainers. The course has proved hugely successful to date and all veterinary surgeons that have attended found it a valuable and extremely useful course to help them with structuring and presenting courses in the future.

Tony Kemmish of XLVets St Boniface Veterinary Clinic, one of the first people to complete the full course comments, 'I have been involved in farmer training for several years, but the 'Train the Trainer course' has certainly made me think very differently about the way that I will present my talks in the future.'

Congratulations to the XLVets members who have successfully completed the full course to become LANTRA approved trainers:

- **Paul Rodgers**
  Allen and Partners
- **Joseph Henry**
  Alnorthumbria Veterinary Group
- **Richard Evans**
  Bishopton Veterinary Group
- **David Stockton**
  Chapelfield Veterinary Partnership
- **Steve Trickey**
  Chapelfield Veterinary Partnership
- **Charles Marwood**
  Clyde Veterinary Group
- **Mark Thompson**
  Kingsway Veterinary Group
- **Jonathan Stockton**
  Kingsway Veterinary Group
- **Tim O'Sullivan**
  MacPherson O'Sullivan
- **Don McMillan**
  Minster Veterinary Group
- **Anne Abbs**
  Paragon Veterinary Group
- **Kath Aplin**
  Paragon Veterinary Group
- **Rose Willis**
  Scarsdale Veterinary Group
- **Le-Anne Oliver**
  Scott Mitchell Associates
- **Tony Kemmish**
  St Boniface Veterinary Clinic
- **Will Tulley**
  Tyndale Farm Veterinary Practice
- **David Feneley**
  Wensum Valley Veterinary Surgeons
- **Iain Richards**
  Westmorland Veterinary Services Ltd
- **Niall Lyon**
  Willows Veterinary Group
- **Andrew Tyler**
  Willows Veterinary Group
- **Celia Maddock**
  Willows Veterinary Group
- **John Greenwood**
  Willows Veterinary Group
- **Helen Worth**
  Wright & Morten

Further Train the Trainer courses are planned throughout 2010 to ensure as many vets as possible have the opportunity to complete this training, and in turn ensure effective training courses are being delivered to farmers.

SEMEX CONFERENCE 2010

Challenges ahead, but opportunity knocks for dairying in the next decade, conference hears...

The coming decade will bring major political change for the dairy sector, a significant shift in the relationship between farmer and processor, and an increased focus on 'green' issues and responsibilities. But overall the decade will be one of great opportunity for efficient dairy businesses. So said speakers at the Semex Dairy Conference in Glasgow, entitled '20:20 Vision'.

Farmers would have to learn to live with volatility and be 'professional on profit' and 'professional on people' according to John Allen, of dairy consultancy firm Kite. Although this year would not prove to be anything spectacular in terms of milk price rises the long-term outlook for dairy is excellent, and professional and competitive farms in the UK are well placed to capitalise on the opportunities. But businesses would have to learn to live with volatility, and he predicted that 'milk could be more volatile than any other soft commodity in the world'.

David Black of Paragon and XLVets spoke on the theme of 'Your Farm; Many Tools; One Team'. He stressed that vets and advisers were not there to 'take over' the running of the farm, but rather to help the farmer identify the issues that are felt important on that farm, set targets and work towards those targets. Mr Black discussed the various tools that are available, such as data analysis software; that utilises milk recording data, simple dairy based on-farm recording systems of disease and regular (little and often) testing of groups of animals to monitor metabolic status, such as non-esterified fatty acids, (NEFAs), blood urea and calcium. He emphasised, 'these tools should be selected on a farm-by-farm basis and used to give concise and manageable outputs.' Finally Mr Black described great opportunities for farmers working more closely in 'teams' on-farm; incorporating the vet, the nutritionist and other specialist advisers, so that everyone was 'singing from the same spreadsheet'!

David Black, XLVets
Paragon Veterinary Group

MARTIN PEAT

Castle Veterinary Surgeons

The cow has a 21 day oestrus cycle but this can vary between 18 and 24 days. Heifers will begin cycling at the onset of puberty and will continue to cycle until they are in calf.

The Oestrus Cycle; detection of, and dealing with problems with it

The onset of puberty can be affected by various factors such as breed, nutrition, growth rate and disease. After calving, cows will begin to cycle after 20 to 30 days. This may be extended in high yielding cows or those affected by disease post calving.

The oestrus cycle is governed by the complex interactions of various hormones that are produced in the brain and ovaries, progesterone and oestrogen being two of these. The follicle (egg) grows throughout the cycle and ovulation (the release of the egg) occurs when the progesterone levels drop and the oestrogen rises.

A structure called the corpus luteum then forms on the ovary, which then produces progesterone.

Oestrus Detection

Oestrus is defined as the period of maximal sexual activity. The average duration is thought to be only 8 hours for the modern dairy cow, however it can range from 2 - 30 hours. There are various signs and different animals will express these to varying degrees.

Signs include:

- Increased restlessness and activity.
- Decreased feed intake and milk yield.
- Bellowing when isolated.
- Slight increase (0.1°C) in body temperature.
- Clear vulval mucus ('bulling string').
- Rub marks and sores over the tail head.
- Mounting other cows, particularly mounting the cow from head on.
- Standing to be mounted.

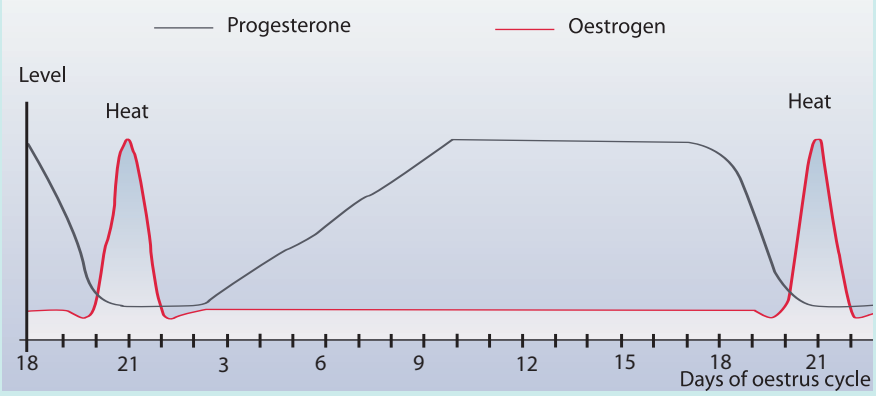
Detection of oestrus involves being able to observe and record this behaviour. The most reliable sign is observing a standing response when ridden.

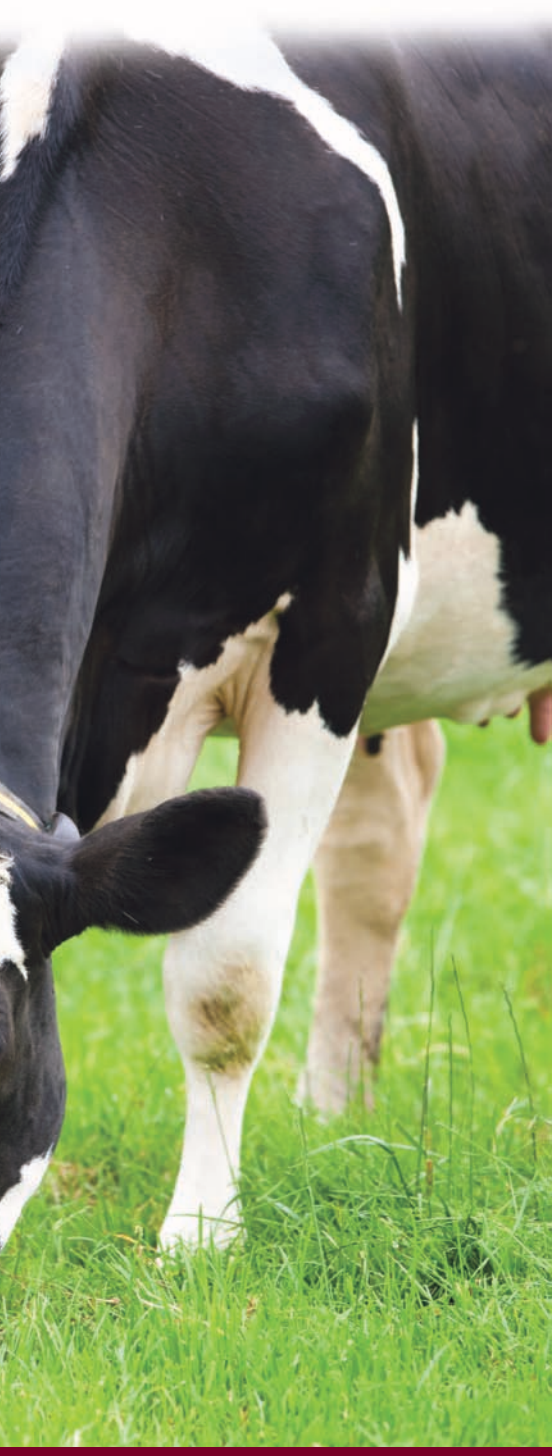
There are various reasons why heats are missed. These are usually because cows are not showing heat strongly or staff are not observing cows when they are in heat.

The main causes of this are:

- Increased herd size leading to more cows per member of staff.
- Failure to recognise oestrus due to inadequate staff training.
- Looking for heat at the wrong time of day.
- Poor environment; slippery floors and overcrowding will reduce the chance of cows exhibiting normal behaviour.
- Short weak oestrus; the average cow is in oestrus for a shorter period than she was 25 years ago. This has partly been blamed upon increasing milk yields.

FIGURE 1. THE OESTRUS CYCLE





THE OESTRUS CYCLE

This shows the waves of progesterone and oestrogen, with the cow being in heat during the surge in oestrogen.

If the cow does not become pregnant this is repeated. If she is pregnant the progesterone level remains high.

"After calving cows will begin to cycle after 20 to 30 days. This may be extended in high yielding cows or those affected by disease post calving"

Improving heat detection

For good heat detection there must be:

- Clear identification of cows by freeze branding or easy to read ear tags.
- Adequate light to ensure cows can be seen in heat and identified.
- Regular oestrus observation. Try to set aside three periods of 20 - 30 minutes throughout the day that are not associated with feeding or milking for heat detection. Most mounting activity will take place between 6pm and 6am so it is important to observe cows during this period.
- A good recording system, either computerised or manual with all heats recorded including those before the service period.
- Adequate loafing areas with nonslip floors to allow cows to exhibit normal oestrus behaviour.

Heat detection may be further improved by using:

- Heat mount detectors. These are stuck on the cow's back, on the tail head and are triggered by the pressure of another cow mounting them, leading to a colour change. Examples of these are Kamars™, Bovine Beacons™ or Estrotect™.

An Estrotect heat mount detector with the silver surface well scratched off indicating she is likely to be in heat.

- Tail paint. This works by a similar principle to above with paint rubbed off by mounting behaviour. Tail paint needs to be reapplied when it becomes dry and cracked.
- Motion detectors/pedometers. These are attached to either the neck or leg bands respectively and any increases in walking activity are remotely detected and recorded on a computer. These can be very useful, but care must be used in interpreting them as there may be other reasons for increased activity.

A cow wearing a pedometer to aid heat detection.

- Regular milk progesterone assays. To detect the fall in milk progesterone prior to oestrus. On-farm kits are available, but will only become practical on a large scale when in line detectors become available.
- Synchronisation. Groups of cows can be synchronised with hormone treatment to allow fixed time AI.

There are various hormone treatments available for cows with ovarian cysts and those that are anoestrus ('not cycling').

In some herds it may be appropriate to use hormone regimes to allow fixed time AI or to allow compacted periods of heat detection.

An example of this is the Intercept ™ regime which involves the use of injections of prostaglandin and GnRH. Another option is the use of PRIDs or CIDRs. There are several options and the best one for your herd can be discussed with your vet.

COST OF DISEASE

- There are various figures quoted for the costs of an extended calving to conception interval. The relative cost per day increases the longer the interval. This cost calculated using extra feed costs loss of milk yield and increased veterinary costs.
- The cost rises from £2.47 per day with a month's delay to £6.52 per day for 5 month's delay. (DAISY Research Report No.5)

Regular examination of cows that are either not seen bulling, that have short cycles or prolonged bulling behaviour allow for the identification of follicular or luteal ovarian cysts, or anoestrus and allows prompt treatment by a vet before too much time is lost.

KAREN LANCASTER

Dairy farmers across the South West are looking at their cows with fresh eyes following a series of DairyCo events on Cow Signals.

Cow Signals

The concept of reading cow behaviour to identify problem areas in their surroundings or routine is growing in popularity, and enabling dairy farmers to more closely meet their cows' needs, leading to increased production and lower costs.

Rachael Grigg, Cornwall extension officer for DairyCo, says the series of five events has been a great success. 'One farmer said the invitation alone was enough to make him go and look at his cows. It's all about looking at things with fresh eyes, and people have gone away from the events planning to make changes to their systems as a result.'

Karen Lancaster, a qualified vet and DairyCo extension officer for Cumbria and Lancashire, says that cows have six key needs - food, water, air, light, rest and space. By going into the cattle housing and assessing cow behaviour, posture and physical signs with a detached viewpoint, it is easy to identify areas that could be improved.

'Because farmers spend all day, every day, around their cows they often stop seeing the bigger picture - it is just about getting them to take a step back. By observing their cows there are many things that farmers can do very easily and cheaply that can make a big difference.'

Light and ventilation are often big problems on dairy farms, as older sheds tend to be quite dark and enclosed, says Miss Lancaster. Cows need 16-18 hours of a minimum of 200 lux of light a day to maximise feed intakes and fertility, giving an increase in milk yield of up to 16%. It is also beneficial for their fertility to provide them with 6-8 hours of less than 50 lux of light mimicking night-time. 'Daylight is the cheapest form of light available, so taking out some Yorkshire boarding or putting extra skylights in is a low cost option which also increases ventilation.'

Cows should ideally spend 14 hours a day lying down, so they have to be comfortable. 'A quick test is to drop to your knees at the front of the cubicle and see how comfortable it is. Look out for hock lesions - they are a good indicator of cubicle comfort and the abrasiveness of the bedding.'

At any one time some 85% of cows in cubicles should be lying down, she adds. 'If they are not achieving that, look at the possible reasons why.' If the cows are standing half in, half out of the cubicle, the neck rail could be too far back. If their hind end is hanging over the edge of the cubicle when lying down, the brisket locator is too far back. 'Often it is only minor changes that need to be made.'

Another common pitfall is slippery or dirty walking surfaces in collecting yards or housing, which can result in accidents, lameness, and queuing cattle. A useful test for this is called the Ballerina Test. 'Stand on the spot and try to twist round on one foot - if you get more than half way round the surface is too slippery and could need grooving.'

By monitoring their cows' behaviour, farmers often pick up on illnesses or problems more quickly. It is also an opportunity to score the herd's mobility and condition, leading to further health and financial benefits. 'All you have to do is go and look at what your cows are telling you, as every herd and unit is different.'

CASE STUDY

Stephen and Richard Dark, who hosted one of the events at Trudnoe Farm, Mullion, Cornwall, have already made some changes as a result.

'One of the main things I have done is allow the cows an eight-hour period of reduced lighting overnight to improve their fertility,' says Stephen. 'We're also

looking at getting some of the concrete passageways grooved as they are a bit slippery in places.'

With 180 cows housed over the winter, the brothers were pleased to notice how well the cows were using the mattress and sand-bedded cubicles. 'If we were to add extra cubicles in the future we would just copy what we've got. We also need to give the cows a larger feeding area, so we discussed what type of manger to put in so the cows are comfortable feeding,' Stephen continues.

'I have always checked the cows three or four times a day, but now I am more aware of how they are behaving and using the shed. I look at whether they are cudding well and looking full - you just have to imagine that you're a stranger looking at the unit for the first time.'

The Cow Signals approach looks for the secrets of success in dairy farming. Cows need a high amount of Feed, Water, Light, Air, Space and Rest. If you give it to them, they have little reason to become ill anymore and are strong, happy, healthy cows.

On every dairy in the world, one of these points will be the most critical for cow health and welfare - and for the farmer's income. Often, 3 or 4 of these items can be improved.

THE FACTS

Strong, healthy, happy cows:

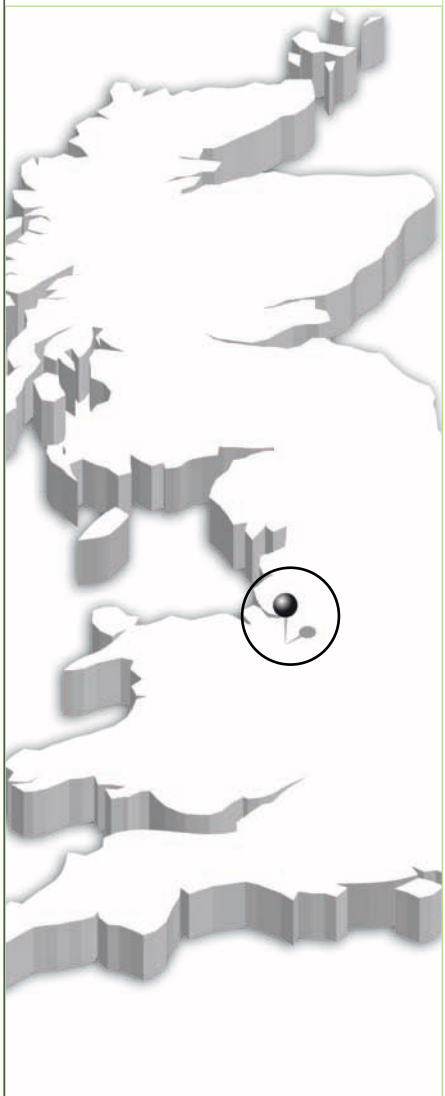
- lie down for 12hrs/day in comfy beds
- have one feed space and lying space each
- enjoy 16 hours light, and 8 hours dark
- stay cool! between 5 and 15 °C
- have milking times : 2hrs/day
- have access to tasty feed and water 24hrs/day

…and if they have 'special needs', they will be on super soft, super spacy beds, with minimal stress and extra-special care!

OWEN ATKINSON

Running CowSignals Workshops across the UK...

Lambert Leonard & May LLP
First in the field



Veterinary Surgeon	Owen Atkinson
XLVets Practice	Lambert, Leonard & May Nantwich, Cheshire

Owen Atkinson, a partner with XLVets practice, Lambert, Leonard and May Farm Vets, is also a CowSignals instructor with experience of running CowSignals workshops around the United Kingdom.

Owen comments, 'farmers really seem to enjoy participating in Cow Signals workshops; they are fun as well as informative. Every dairy farmer is already an expert in cow body language because they work with cows every day, so some begin the day perhaps with some scepticism that they will learn anything more.

'However, these same farmers are usually the ones who leave a workshop day with the most enthusiasm to go back to their own farms to practise their new skills! I love running the workshops because they really do make a difference to the way farmers manage and house their cows. These positive changes lead to happier, healthier cows, and happier, more profitable farms,' he concludes.

COWSIGNALS **WORKSHOPS**

XLVets has seven trained CowSignals instructors and CowSignals workshops can be arranged by XLVets FarmSkills. For further details contact your local XLVets practice or the FarmSkills office on 07748 805497.

'CowSignals training helps first in powers of observation, then in thinking about the causes of what we see, and finally what we can do about it. It's the Look, Think, Act principle.'

Owen Atkinson *BVSc CertCHP MRCVS*

PULL-OUT GUIDE

xL vets
Excellence in Practice

PULL OUT & KEEP

01 Dairy Fertility

Jonathan Statham Bishopton Vet Group

The most important part of getting cows in calf is heat detection. This needs to be accurate and timely and investments made in improving your heat detection are well worth it.

FarmSkills
GROWING TALENT IN FARMING
DAIRY

PULL-OUT GUIDE

Focus on **HEATS** to improve fertility and save around £4/cow/day

H — Health Status

Monitor diseases such as BVD, IBR, Johnes, Leptospirosis, Neospora and Campylobacter and vaccinate where possible to improve the health and fertility of your herd.

Become a closed herd if possible, but if purchasing bulls or heifer replacements then screen for health status first with your vet.

E — Environment

Can cows express signs of heat easily in buildings? Low roof height and slippery floors make it hard to detect cows.

- Mobility score the herd, lameness is a major cause of infertility
- Foot bath regularly to control digital dermatitis
- How comfortable are cow cubicles?
- Have regular visits from the foot trimmer or enrol on a FarmSkills Hoofcare course to do this yourself (see below)
- Identify and record cases to assess which problems are a priority for your herd, focus on prevention and prompt, effective treatment

When a cow approaches calving, her soft tissues loosen. Too much time standing on concrete and/or not lying down at this time predisposes to sole ulcers in later lactation - lame cows take longer to get in calf. Straw bedded yards for cows 2-3 weeks before and after calving are ideal.

A — Attention to detail

Regular routine veterinary fertility visits for:

- Post-calving checks
- Cows not seen in oestrus by end of VWP
- Early pregnancy diagnosis with an ultrasound scanner

Activity meters

Reduce the reliance on observation of behaviours by additionally using either automated devices such as HeatTime which monitor cow activity or milk progesterone testing

T — Transition

A carefully balanced, low potassium diet with a high inclusion of structural fibre, e.g. based on whole crop wheat or maize silage will help prevent post-calving problems.

Avoid over-conditioned cows (> BCS 3.0) at calving, excessive fat mobilisation is then inevitable with depressed dry matter intake and risk of fatty liver. Preparing the rumen for the coming lactation and preventing milk fever (clinical and sub-clinical) are priorities. Cows with borderline milk fever experience delayed involution of the uterus and clear post-calving infections more slowly.

Consider whether your cows would benefit from the addition of biotin in the diet to reduce clawhorn disease.

Nutritionally challenged cows suffer extended negative energy balance post-calving. This results in poor oestrus expression, or 'suboestrus'

- Use nutritional monitoring of milk parameters such as protein fat and lactose levels as well as profiling of blood samples (NEFA & BHB)
- Monitor body condition score at drying-off, calving and service
- Boost dry matter intakes by providing extra feed space for transition and fresh cows (>0.7-1.0m/cow)
- Offer palatable balanced feed based on high quality forages ad lib

S — Service

-Synchronisation
-Submission rates
-Semen quality

Aim to reduce the voluntary waiting period to 40 days. Focus on accurate timing of service, when is ovulation occurring?

- Aged semen or eggs at insemination increase risk of embryo mortality

Consider synchronisation if submission rates are unsatisfactory. Quality counts: take extra care with thawing and transport of semen. Upskill or refresh your knowledge by joining a FarmSkills DIY AI course.

FarmSkills
GROWING TALENT IN FARMING
DAIRY

XLVet UK Ltd
Carlisle House, Townhead Road,
Dalston, Carlisle CA5 7JF
T: (01228) 711788 E: farmskills@xlvets.co.uk
www.farm-skills.co.uk

Work with your vet on herd health planning and enrol on FarmSkills courses to yield better results in herd fertility. Relevant topics include:

- Nutrition for better fertility
- Foot trimming and lameness management
- DIY AI and understanding fertility (available as refresher courses or for first time users)

HOOK NORTON VETERINARY SURGEONS

Veterinary Surgeon	Helen Taylor
XLVets Practice	Hook Norton Veterinary Surgeons, Oxfordshire

Fluid therapy pays dividends

Giving fluids to cows by mouth is a recent innovation in veterinary practice. The design and manufacture of special equipment to make it safe and easy has led many vets to adopt it over the last few years.

Cows are very sensitive to dehydration. They lose their appetite, produce less milk and become more susceptible to other problems. So, whenever dehydration develops, treating it promptly pays dividends.

Many conditions of dairy cows cause dehydration, or a disturbance in the distribution of fluids in the body with the same effects. The most common of these conditions are toxaemic mastitis, metritis, diarrhoea, loss of appetite and ketosis.

Until recently, the only way to treat dehydration in cows was to give them a concentrated infusion of saline solution into the vein. This would draw fluid into the circulation from the tissues and the rumen, and would often make cows drink as well.

The treatment of dehydrated cows changed a few years ago, with the introduction of a Danish drenching system. The system consists of a pump, a gag, and a hose that passes through the gag and down the gullet. The drenching system allows a large volume of water and electrolytes (salts) to be delivered directly into the rumen.

Since the introduction of this system, fluid therapy has come to be much more commonly used. The prompt use of fluid therapy can be a life-saver for cows with severe, acute conditions like toxaemic mastitis. The reason why these cows may die is that the normal distribution of fluids in the body is disturbed. The consequence is that blood is not distributed normally to the organs, and it is the deterioration of these organs which leads to the cow's death. Fluid therapy saves lives by restoring the circulation of the blood to normality.

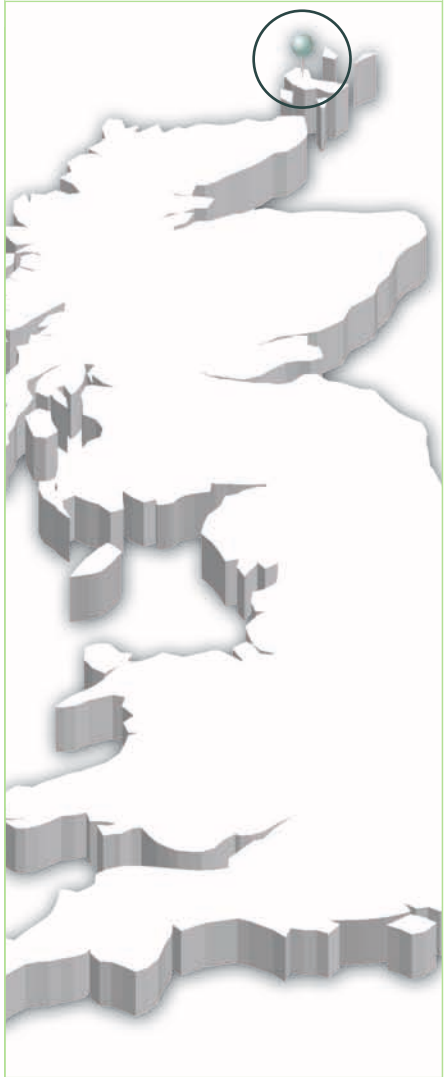
Even cows in which diseases like toxaemic mastitis are milder benefit from fluid therapy. Their appetite recovers sooner, and the clearance of toxins from the body is accelerated. Anyone who has seen fluid therapy used in such cases will have noticed how much more quickly they recover. One farmer who has seen the benefits of fluid therapy is Stuart Rogers, who milks 140 pedigree Holsteins at Model Farm, Kidlington, in Oxfordshire. Helen Taylor from XLVets Hook Norton Veterinary Surgeons does most of the work on Mr Rogers's farm, and is an enthusiast of the system.

In April and May of last year, Mr Rogers saw an increased incidence of displaced abomasum following changes in the TMR he had to make after running out of wheat straw. But, fortunately, Miss Taylor had instituted a system of post-calving checks on the farm. Cows with problems were routinely given fluids using the Selekt drenching system. She believes this prevented a number of expensive cases of displaced abomasum.

'Freshly calved cows are normally dehydrated. Their opportunity to drink has been limited and they have lost water vapour through sweating and an increased respiratory rate, so they will benefit from fluids. Pumping a large volume of water into the rumen offers the opportunity to provide a generous amount of calcium and an anti-ketotic energy source. This reduces the risks of milk fever and ketosis. It also reduces the incidence of metritis and displaced abomasums,' advises Helen.

So, if fluid therapy with calcium and an anti-ketotic energy source keeps fresh calvers healthier, what does it do for milk yield? It's the question every dairy farmer will want to ask. There has not yet been a conclusive study of it. But experience in the US and Denmark suggests an improvement in early-lactation milk yield of about 2 litres a day.

NORTHVET VETERINARY GROUP



Veterinary Surgeon	Iain McCulloch
XLVets Practice	Northvet, Kirkwall

When BVD infection was identified as causing almost half the abortions and calf deaths in beef and dairy herds across Orkney in the late nineties, a group of farmers with the help of XLVets' practice Northvet decided drastic action was required. Their ambitious plan was to get the backing of more than 80% of cattle owners as part of a health plan that would not only control the disease but work towards total eradication of BVD across the entire islands network.

Orkney BVD Eradication

Remarkably, 553 farms have taken part in the scheme since it started and nine years on the results speak for themselves. The number of animals detected each year as viraemic with BVD (including Persistently Infected: PI) dropped from over 100 per year to fewer than 10 over a four-year period (2002-2005).

Eight out of 10 farms still actively involved in the BVD eradication programme now have BVD certified free status with buyers on the mainland prepared to pay a premium for cattle. Clean herds have also seen profitability increase by £50 per cow with many farms experiencing a 10% rise in live calves. In addition, low levels of calf pneumonia and scouring have been recorded, reducing vet and medicine costs.

Fundamentally, the source of new cases of BVD infection can be pinpointed quickly because of the close collaboration between Orkney farmers and their vets and by detailed recording through a farm animal health plan.

During 1999, a farmer led organisation was formed - Orkney Livestock Association (OLA) to coordinate the BVD eradication scheme across the islands. Technical support and advice at this time was provided by Dr Sandy Clark and George Gunn of the SAC. Founding OLA members also exchanged information with Sweden's agricultural ministry and farmers where BVD is a notifiable disease and eradication is backed by government funding. A few years later a Cattle Health Certification Standards (CHeCS) accredited scheme called HI Health was launched and OLA became members. Today, technical support and laboratory facilities are provided by Biobest.

To help kickstart the scheme, OLA achieved funding through Orkney Islands Council to pay for laboratory testing of herds for the first four years. This was after it was demonstrated, through a detailed business plan, the significant cost benefit to Orkney's economy of working towards eradication of the disease.

Binscarth Farms

To secure funding and make the initiative a success required more than 80% of Orkney's farmers to join the BVD eradication scheme. Each farm needed to draw-up a farm animal health plan with their vet. Initially, this was aimed at improving bio-security on farms as there are very few natural boundaries between farms on the Islands.

The next stage involved the annual blood testing of 10 animals below the age of 18 months. The status of each animal is recorded using a 'traffic light' system (see panel). Where animals in a herd are found to have been exposed to the disease (green), all cattle in the herd above 6 months old are tested to identify possible PI's (red).

Where viraemic animals are found they are quarantined and, ideally, removed from the herd for slaughter. All breeding animals are also vaccinated unless a 3 metre gap, such as double fencing, is available to isolate the entire herd. Where farms did not follow this principle, disease breakdowns were often noted.

Where two annual tests show a herd to be disease free, it receives a highly regarded BVD-free accreditation.

Just 13 holdings never joined the scheme and today Orkney can still boast that the vast majority of farmers are committed to eradicating BVD. Many have also turned their attention to combating Johne's disease where every animal over two years old in the herd is blood tested annually.

IAIN MCCULLOCH

Orkney's beef and dairy farmers can be justifiably proud of the unique island-wide collaborative approach, but we aren't celebrating just yet, explains XLVets' Iain McCulloch of Kirkwall-based practice Northvet.

There are still a small number of breakdowns occurring which will take a sustained effort to eradicate, he says.

We need to remain vigilant and not let our guard down. BVD is such a troublesome disease that a single PI animal will quickly undo all the hard work gone before, just by coming into contact with other animals. He admits that the scale of the disease caught everyone by surprise during the late nineties.

We knew that BVD was causing problems in some herds, but when repeated tests kept coming back positive, action needed to be taken because of the concentration of cattle in Orkney.

Northvet fully supported OLA's farmer-led formation by providing technical advice and updates. A huge effort was put into organising a large number of parish level meetings to explain about the disease and how animal health planning and vaccination could work.

The meetings were very well attended. Some farmers really 'opened up' about disease levels on their own farms. Despite initial scepticism by a few in the supply chain, particularly as the vaccines were very new, the majority became convinced by the island-wide approach. To tackle BVD successfully, it's either all or nothing, adds Mr McCulloch.

He says the idea to operate an 'excellent' traffic light status system developed by Andrew Curwen, a then industry vet working for a vaccine supplier, also helped simplify monitoring and action.

During the formative years of the scheme, some farms chose to keep PI animals on the holding, but isolated from the rest of the herd because no compensation was available for slaughtered animals.

We thought we could contain and control PI's, but it's virtually impossible. We've learned a lot since then and now we advocate removal and slaughter of all PI's. The loss of an animal is not insignificant but it pays to remove them in the long term.

Mr McCulloch reports that PI's are thankfully now at very low numbers and with a little bit of investigation a vet and farmer can pinpoint how each individual case occurred.

The added benefits of controlling BVD have been many, not least the greater number of healthy calves born and also the large reduction in sick calves with scour and pneumonia.

Many still remember the many hours spent nursing sickly calves. Stopping this has reduced stress levels both for animals and their keepers. Many have regained a pride and satisfaction in their jobs. Furthermore, Orkney's reputation for producing healthy, quality stock has helped maintain and improve the high demand from mainland buyers.

Northvet, through practical farm health plans, is also helping farmers tackle Johne's disease using blood testing and faecal examination every 12 months with positive cases slaughtered.

The main signs in cattle are progressive weight loss and chronic diarrhoea and losses can exceed 5% in a herd. Just like BVD it is critical that all measures are taken to prevent introduction of infection because eradication of disease once prevalent in the herd proves very costly and may take many years to eradicate, advises Mr McCulloch.

THE DAMAGING EFFECTS OF BOVINE VIRAL DIARRHOEA (BVD)

- A viral disease of cattle caused by a Pestivirus
- Considered widespread in UK cattle herds
- Infection with BVD may cause or contribute to:
- Reproductive failure (infertility, abortion, foetal mummification)
- Respiratory disease
- Gastrointestinal disease
- Congenital defects
- Immunosuppression
- Subclinical infection
- Persistently infected (PI) calves likely to die of mucosal disease before two years of age.

ORKNEY FACTS

- 70 islands - 17 inhabited
- Around 500 active farm holdings
- Covering 95,000 hectares (237,000 acres)
- Mainly low lying, fertile soils
- Temperate climate, warmed by Gulf Stream
- 2,000 employed in agriculture both full and part-time
- Highest density of beef cattle in Europe
- 100,000 cattle, mostly suckler cows and followers
- Around 2,500 dairy cows
- About 500 beef units
- Typical herd size is around 85 cows

£50 PER COW
- the increase in profitability in BVD free herds

TRAFFIC LIGHT WARNING SYSTEM

Orkney's cattle BVD status is recorded as:

- **White** - Antibody Negative and Virus/Antigen Negative. Animals that have not been exposed to the disease.
- **Green** - Antibody Positive. Animals that have been exposed to BVD.
- **Red** - Virus/Antigen Positive. Animals infected in the womb. Continue to shed virus after birth. Commonly referred to as Persistently Infected (PI's).

378 PI cattle during 2001-2002

14 PI cattle during 2005-2006

RULES OF THE SCHEME

Other fundamental rules of the scheme

- Bought-in stock must be isolated for 3 weeks and tested
- Clean and disinfect shared machinery, equipment, livestock trailers and handling facilities after use
- Restrict visitors
- Follow good general bio-security measures at all times

45% the amount of abortions and neonatal deaths caused by BVD at the start of the eradication programme

85% the number of farmers that are OLA members

Case Study: Craebreck Farm

Duncan Gaudie
Craebreck Farm, Holm

Suckler cow producer Duncan Gaudie is fully supportive of the BVD eradication scheme, but wished it had been set up sooner than 2001. This might have prevented severe losses at his 220-acre Craebreck Farm at Holm after testing revealed 12 'red' animals in his 120 cow spring calving herd. This was after 18 calves died, most at birth but 4 calves died of BVD linked to mucosal disease at 4 to 5 months of age.

BVD infection swept through his herd during 1999, the cost of which he puts at £20,000 based on the cattle that had to be slaughtered. However, when labour and medicine costs linked to attending to severely scouring calves and calf deaths are added, he reckons the true cost was probably nearer £30,000.

'I never want to see the disease again. The knock-on effects of diseased animals are just as bad as having to slaughter animals. We were spending up to 3 hours with different calves each day trying to keep them alive. Cows had to be trussed up to protect us and their calves. This caused a lot of stress. It was all very demoralising,' he remembers.

He believes most of his efforts of nursing weak calves were in vain and that looking back the best thing to have done would have been to put most of them down.

'During the second summer we kept them inside to stop the spread of disease to other herds. But these 'red' animals were still on the farm and their presence caused other cattle to suffer from pneumonia, mastitis and scours. Their immune system couldn't fight the other diseases when it was already fighting off BVD.'

The leaving of a long term worker and the move to Single Farm Payment saw the business take a different direction in 2006 by becoming fully organic. Mr Gaudie reduced stocking rates and simplified his system. He now uses grass clover mixtures to provide grazing and silage as well as fixating atmospheric nitrogen, saving a considerable sum on bought-in fertiliser.

'Being organic really focuses the mind on prevention rather than cure and working to a farm health plan is a real benefit. This includes a vaccination programme for breeding stock, which I will continue to do until the Island is declared BVD free,' he says.

Charolais and Aberdeen Angus bulls produce well fleshed animals from the farm's Belgium Blue X and Simmental X single suckler herd, which are taken through to finished and sold to Orkney's abattoir. He's now a member of the OLA committee and very keen to see it continue and extend monitoring to help tackle Johne's disease.

Duncan Gaudie & Iain McCulloch

BVD EFFECTS AT CRAEBRECK FARM

- Around £30k cost to the business
- 12 red animals identified
- Contacts with pneumonia and severe scouring
- Major time and medicine investment
- Elevated human and animal stress levels

Case Study: East Howe Farm

From a position of little knowledge of the disease 10 years ago, the harsh realities of BVD infection have left a permanent impression with suckler cow producer, Stevie Hay.

He's convinced that his then 65-cow herd became infected from a group of bought cows in 1998 and says the disease spread through his entire herd like 'wildfire'.

More used to the odd death or barren cow, the spring calving of 1999 highlighted the true extent of BVD infection when 8 cows aborted and a further 5 were barren.

Furthermore, many calves born were very weak and had severe scours. 'They required round the clock attention and treatment. However, despite all our best efforts, four died after several days while the rest remained poor and ill-thriving,' says Mr Hay.

'It was at this point that the alarm bells started ringing. We'd never seen anything as bad as this before. We called in Iain McCulloch from Northvet to help and his actions quickly identified we had a serious BVD infection.'

Further laboratory testing helped confirm Mr McCulloch's prognosis. A robust vaccination programme followed, which is still being adhered to. Because of the problems experienced by the East Howe herd, Mr Hay contacted the Orkney Livestock Association to learn about the group's plan to eradicate BVD throughout Orkney.

He signed up for membership immediately, became a steering group member and also encouraged other farms to join.

With his two brothers, Stevie Hay also runs a stubble-to-stubble contracting business and sells barley and straw, which means he regularly comes into contact with many other farmers.

'Thankfully, the vast majority of farmers signed up to the health scheme and have benefited from the hard work of OLA and Northvet's Iain McCulloch who helped drive the project forward. It is very important farmers use all the skills of their vet. They're up-to-date with the latest knowledge and medicine. We have a great relationship with Northvet as I know most farmers do.'

Under the scheme, a full herd test at East Howe was completed in 2001. Just a single animal registered positive with the disease and this was immediately culled and recorded.

Farming on the North West coast of Orkney's mainland at Birsay, East Howe Farm extends to around 170-acres while a similar amount of ground is rented offering grazing and feed for the 100-cow Aberdeen X and Limousin X herd.

Males are sold at store sales at Orkney auction mart while heifers are fed on home-grown barley, silage, haylage with dark grains and sugar beet pulp and grown on to 550kg for sale to Orkney Meat in Kirkwall. The business now operates an almost entirely closed-herd policy. However, some breeding cows are bought through BVD free accredited local sales.

Working with Northvet, Mr Hay's farm animal health plan also includes tackling Johnes disease through regular blood testing. He admits it's going to be tough to eliminate from the herd, but that the herd health plan is helping. Looking back to when BVD first hit East Howe farm, Stevie Hay is adamant that he never wants to relive the whole situation again.

'I don't want to go through the events of 1999 ever again. It's important that we continue working together to keep our herds BVD free.'

Stevie Hay

Stevie Hay
East Howe Farm, Birsay

BVD EFFECTS AT EAST HOWE FARM

- First infection 1999
- 8 cows aborted, 5 barren
- Subsequent calf deaths
- Weak surviving animals
- Round the clock treatment
- Increased vaccination costs
- Large financial losses

Case Study: Binscarth Farms

Major Malcolm Macrae
Binscarth Farms, Finstown

Maintaining a high health status for his 150-cow Simmental X Aberdeen Angus herd was the driving force behind Major Malcolm Macrae's decision to be part of Orkney's BVD eradication scheme.

'When the scheme was first suggested in 2001, I was confident my herd didn't have BVD infection as no clinical signs had been observed. But it was the right thing to do, to support this island-wide health initiative,' recalls Major Macrae.

Testing of the entire herd at Binscarth Farms, Finstown, confirmed his belief, when each animal was passed BVD free and subsequently became accredited. As a precaution, animals where vaccinated and the herd was given a clean bill of health over the next three years.

However, a disastrous breakdown of the product being used to vaccinate stock coupled with contact of infected animals from a neighbouring herd quickly undid several years of treatment and biosecurity.

A single reactor was found in 2006. But in the following year 10 animals reacted to the annual test and were quickly isolated and recorded as red under the scheme. However, the health deteriorated quickly in some animals and eventually all had to be slaughtered costing at least £10,000.

'We did everything we were supposed to that was set out in a farm health plan by Northvet. Our herd had been closed since the days of BSE and we take biosecurity very seriously. I just hadn't banked on a major vaccine breakdown. We thought the herd was safeguarded. It was both very annoying and costly,' he explains.

'The whole experience hit us hard financially and what's more we lost our BVD disease free status. We hope to gain accreditation again in 2010 following more tests.'

Despite the setback, Major Macrae is fully supportive of farm health planning and the BVD eradication scheme led by Orkney Livestock Association and Northvet.

'Getting free of BVD would be a fantastic achievement and help enormously in marketing our stock. Orkney farmers are good at working together and what the OLA has done has been first class.'

Based on the west side of the main island, Binscarth Farms extends to 1,500 acres of grassland, arable and permanent upland pasture. Home-grown crimped barley is fed to the herd, with silage plus dark grains and some minerals.

Calving is predominately during the spring with stores and fattening animals produced from both Aberdeen Angus and Charolais bulls.

Under the farm's animal health plan, Johne's disease is also being tackled following advice by Northvet.

Major Malcolm Macrae

BVD EFFECTS AT BINSCARTH FARMS

- Infection seen in 2006
- Major vaccine breakdown
- Disease contracted from neighbouring herd
- 10 store animals culled in 2007
- Lost BVD free status
- Huge cost to business
- Switched vaccine use

ISABELLE TRUYERS

Detailed study providing further invaluable information

Orkney's farmers continue to benefit from detailed information generated by Isabelle Truyers, a veterinary surgeon doing a residency at the University of Glasgow.

As part of her three-year residency training programme with Northvet Veterinary Group, Isabelle embarked on a major study investigating the epidemiology, clinical consequences and economics of Orkney's BVD eradication scheme as part of a joint project with Northvet, the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, the University of Glasgow and supported by the RCVS Trust.

To date, the project has proved invaluable in coordinating and analysing the vast amount of animal testing data that the scheme has generated. As well as giving a retrospective view on what the scheme has achieved so far, the project is also providing useful evidence-based guidance and encouragement to other eradication schemes which are starting throughout the UK.

Isabelle's work has generated interest amongst Orkney's farmers who have been generally very co-operative in allowing the data to be used. In addition, Isabelle has investigated individual farms which have suffered a breakdown in their BVD-free status.

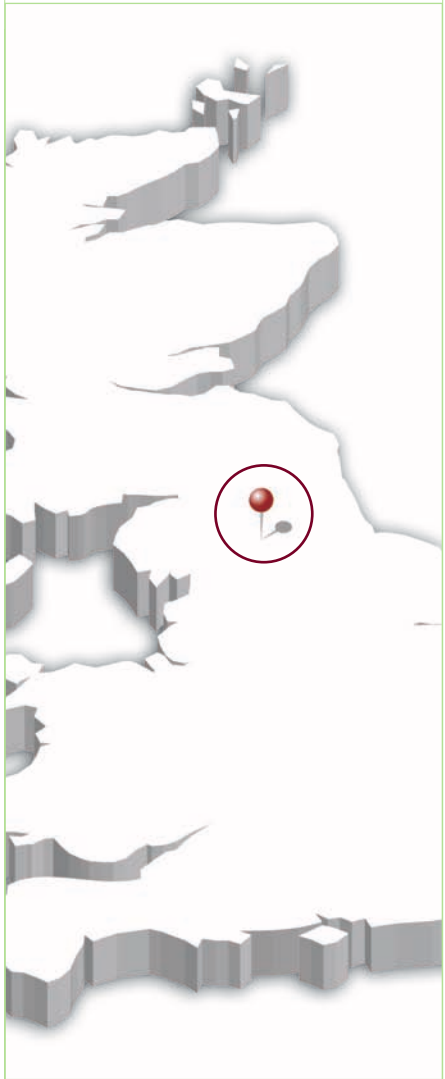
ISABELLE'S **INITIAL FINDINGS**

Initial findings from Isabelle's work including the strategies used and the results obtained by the Orkney BVD eradication scheme, have been submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed veterinary journal.

Castle Veterinary Surgeons

Preventing coccidiosis in lambs - and protecting weight gains

Coccidiosis is a common disease in lambs, which reduces growth rates and depresses performance. The main sign of clinical disease is diarrhoea; however, even at sub-clinical levels of infection, weight gains are still compromised. So, in the interests of both animal welfare and performance, prevention of coccidiosis rather than treatment post-infection, is the best action to take.



Veterinary Surgeon	Fiona Lovatt
XLVets Practice	Castle Veterinary Group County Durham

Fiona Lovatt

Initially lambs become infected with the coccidial parasite by ingesting its oocysts (eggs) from the environment - especially on pastures which have carried infected lambs in past seasons. Ewes can also shed low levels of oocysts.

Once ingested, the coccidia grow and multiply in the intestines causing considerable damage to the cell wall lining, reducing feed conversion rates and growth. In fact, a single ingested oocyst can multiply to up to 16 million oocysts within three weeks, and these are excreted into the environment where they cause a challenge to other lambs.

Generally, very young lambs are protected by maternally-derived immunity. So although coccidiosis is possible from about 4 weeks old, in my experience it is most usually seen in lambs between about 6 weeks and 8 weeks of age. The lambs that are most at risk of developing the disease are younger lambs which are put into pens or turned onto pastures which have already carried older lambs. These younger lambs have not yet built up any immunity and are then suddenly exposed to an environment where oocysts are present. The gut then becomes heavily damaged by coccidiosis, and diarrhoea and sometimes even death can occur.

One memorable case was a farm that kept lambs inside, in clean and well bedded buildings, for a month before turning them out into paddocks.

The stocking density outside was high and the fields must have been highly contaminated with overwintered oocysts. In the groups of lambs that were released untreated, scouring began a fortnight after turnout and some died within two days of the start of the scouring - with one group reaching a 10% mortality rate.

Scouring and deaths were only prevented in the groups that were treated with an anticoccidial, in anticipation of the problem, in this case, just over a week after turnout.

Even in the absence of diarrhoea, sub-clinical levels of coccidiosis will still compromise lamb growth rates, and if left untreated can develop into clinical disease.

Signs of coccidial disease in lambs include: abdominal pain (lambs are hunched up), straining as they pass faeces, dehydration (lambs drink a lot at the troughs), inappetence, reduced weight gain and general unthriftiness.

Coccidial infection, and the consequent gut damage, also means the lamb is more susceptible to secondary bacterial infections.

GOOD MANAGEMENT ON THE FARM

In order to reduce the coccidiosis challenge on the farm and protect lamb growth rates, an integrated approach is best: combine good flock management with good farm hygiene measures and when necessary, consider the strategic use of a coccidiocide.

Dosing with an oral coccidiocide is the most reliable way of ensuring that every animal receives a sufficient dosage of medication for effective control of the disease. Coccidiosis is a highly contagious disease, so all the lambs in a flock will need to be treated against it.

By contrast, in-feed coccidiostats are convenient, but they do rely on each lamb getting a sufficient amount of medication every day for at least 28 days. Lambs may not be on creep at the time of challenge and, even if they are, a lamb that does not eat well, even for a short period, will lose full protection. Also, coccidiostats do not kill existing coccidia but merely prevent further reproduction of the parasite in the small intestine.

In order to diagnose whether diarrhoea and/or poor lamb performance is due to coccidiosis, faecal samples can be taken for assessment of coccidial oocysts. There are two species of the single-celled organism Eimeria that are pathogenic to sheep. Speciation of the oocysts in the faeces (undertaken at a laboratory) will determine if these are present, and whether an anti-coccidial treatment is needed. It is important not to rely simply on high coccidia counts as there are many types of coccidia that are not harmful.

As well as medication, the following practical measures should be taken to reduce the disease challenge to young lambs:

- Ensure good hygiene in the lambing shed, and use plenty of clean bedding.
- Food and water containers should be raised off the ground to avoid the risk of contamination from faeces.
- If stocking rates can be lowered, then this will reduce disease pressure.
- Minimise stress to the lambs as this undoubtedly exacerbates the problem.
- Avoid turning young lambs into areas where older lambs have been.
- Be aware of the possibilities of Nematodirus worm problems in the early summer - this may also be relevant to 6-12 week old lambs, causing diarrhoea and possibly associated deaths.

  Forecasts are available to predict the risk of Nematodirus and when high, farmers are usually advised to give one or two doses (ten days apart) of a white drench to those lambs at risk.

Finally...

If you think that coccidiosis is a problem on your farm then always invite your vet to come and review the situation with you, and advise on how best to remedy it. Dosing at the wrong time, or against a disease which is not present, is just a waste of time and money!

We would like to thank Bayer Animal Health, manufacturers of Baycox Sheep for kindly supplying this image and for their support with this article.

Sophie Throup FarmSkills Training Co-ordinator

FarmSkills Training

A recent report by LANTRA LandSkills stated:

'It is well evidenced that a well-trained, skilled workforce has been linked to higher productivity. Skills can account for around an 8% productivity difference between well performing and poorly performing organisations.'

As well as increasing productivity, training has been shown to contribute to workplace survival by reducing the chances of a business shutting down by around 50%. And while increasing skills of employees could lead to an increase in wages, research has shown that benefits to the employer in increased productivity exceed any increase in wages.

FarmSkills courses from XLVets, are run across the country and seek to improve the skills levels of the farming workforce, whether in DIY AI and foot trimming or staff management, book-keeping and accounts and nutritional strategy planning. Run on-farm and led by vets and industry leaders, the courses teach to a set learning outcome so you can be sure you will cover the same information whether you're in Scotland or Southampton. Increasing numbers of farmers are also choosing to study groups of FarmSkills courses together and achieve a LANTRA Awards certificate, which can be useful for personal satisfaction or for the career stockperson.

XLVets practices around the country have been engaging in FarmSkills training - here are some updates from them.

Synergy Farm Health - 7th January 2010

Maximising lamb and kid survival

We started by discussing how to revive the lamb or kid that is sluggish at birth, and then had a practical session using dead newborn lambs to explore common causes of death and to practise using a stomach tube and administering intra-peritoneal glucose injections. Participants then used a list of the major risks to lamb and kid survival to score the risks on their farms, so we could focus our discussion on practical ways to minimise these risks. After lunch we looked at feeding the ewe or doe and preparation for lambing/kidding.

Throughout we used training methods that encourage interaction and we focussed on practical techniques to improve results in the individual flock. This was the first in a series of sheep workshops that, together, will build into a comprehensive flock health plan.

Kat Bazeley

Scarsdale Veterinary Group - 7th January 2010

Mastitis and the dry cow

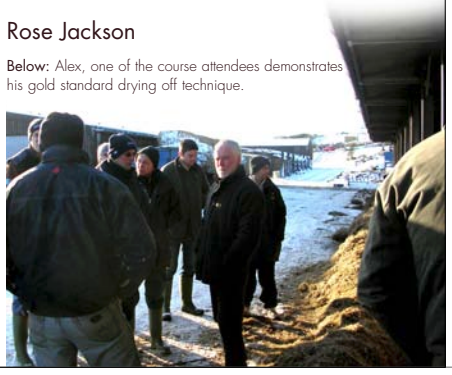
The fourth module of the FarmSkills herdsman certificate run by Scarsdale was held on the 7th January. A variety of people attended including owners of smaller family run farms, farm staff from larger herds and one chap who has returned to dairying after a few years out of the industry.

The morning session was held at the practice and kicked off with small group discussions based around a set of questions. This gave us a bit of an idea of what each farm was already doing in terms of mastitis control and record keeping. James Breen of Nottingham Vet School then led a presentation on getting the most from your records and mastitis costings. We learnt that it is very important to define where the mastitis is predominantly coming from on your farm i.e. is it from the dry period or of lactational origin? This information then helps us to put the relevant control measures in place - what works for one farm does not necessarily work for another. James also demonstrated some benchmarking of data from the farms of the attendees to make it more relevant and to engage the trainees further.

Despite the snow and a slightly hairy drive, the afternoon session was held at the highest dairy farm in our patch. Following a hearty lunch in the farm kitchen, we began with a farm walk looking specifically at the environment with respect to mastitis risk factors. This was followed by an interactive practical session in the parlour covering gold standard drying off technique, how to take a sterile milk sample and getting the best from your California mastitis test. All of the people who attended the course said that they would be interested in attending future modules.

Rose Jackson

Below: Alex, one of the course attendees demonstrates his gold standard drying off technique.



Glenthorne Veterinary Group - 2nd December 2009

Calf Rearing

In December 2009, we ran a very successful FarmSkills calf rearing course, in conjunction with Tom Chamberlain of EBVC, on a local dairy farm. For this course there was a mix of both Dairy and Beef farmers with two of the participants enrolling after seeing the adverts in the Farming Press. One farmer travelled from Herefordshire 70 miles away for the day! There was a presentation by Tom on the essentials of calf rearing, emphasising the importance of colostrum. This was followed by a farm walk to show how the host farm rears its calves and a discussion on the farm's own colostrum management protocols which aim to control both infectious scour and Johnes disease. The feedback on the day was that the participants were going to look at their colostrum management.

What I particularly like about the FarmSkills training concept is to be able to supply the training needs of our clients 'in house', on appropriate topics, which they can suggest.

John Cammack

Opposite: Roger the calf rearer on the host farm, testing colostrum.

Kingsway - 18th November 2009

Dairy Cattle Housing

Kingsway Veterinary Group held a dairy cattle housing workshop on 18th November at Manor Farm, Rylstone, by kind permission of the Caygill Family.

We invited John Hughes as our guest speaker for the workshop. The focus of the meeting was to discuss dairy youngstock housing and respiratory disease. 13 clients attended; mainly dairy farmers but some dairy heifer rearers - this was an ideal number to get a good discussion and participation from the attendees. The farm provided an ideal venue due to the range of traditional and modern buildings there. After a brief introduction to the subject, we walked around the farm buildings with John giving excellent practical advice on pros and cons of the different types of housing and practical solutions to the problems faced. Smoke bombs were let off in each shed - providing a clear demonstration of the ventilation (or lack of it!). We received very good feedback from those who attended - with many taking home practical tips which they will put into place on their farms. This was clearly demonstrated on the host farm; Jonathan Caygill attended the cubicle design workshop which we ran in July and showed the attendees the successful cubicle and feed trough alterations which he has made following the earlier meeting - a clear demonstration of the benefit of attending a FarmSkills course.

Julia Moorhouse

Bishopton Vets

11th November 2009

Staff Management

Fiona Keane from Pearman Learning came to give four delegates an insight into how to get the most out of staff on the farm and how to maximise their potential. Arguing that over the course of employment, a farmer could spend up to £500,000 on his staff, Fiona challenged the delegates to see how they could get the most out of this expensive investment.

Delegates were asked to fill in forms before they came on the course to evaluate how they thought they behaved as a manager. On the day, these skills were explored as Fiona challenged the farmers to think about how they communicate to staff, how they delegate tasks, how they deliver effective feedback and how they could plan to put the learning into practice back on the farm.

All delegates who attended the course have expressed a desire to have 'part two' in a couple of months, to see whether they have been able to put their skills into practice, to share experiences with their fellow course members and to find out what the next steps are in growing as a manager.

Sophie Throup

FARMSKILLS OFFICE

For more information, please contact Sophie or Mina in the FarmSkills office:

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New

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"Farmer, Chris Simmons from Gloucester says: "After just one workshop on FarmSkills milking routines, everybody is now in the same routine and milking exactly as I want them to"... positive benefits from practical courses."

Courses coming up this month:

15 MARCH	On farm slaughter for own use	*Hexham*
16 MARCH	Foot trimming	*Midlands*
16 MARCH	DIY AI	*Salisbury*
16 MARCH	DIY AI	*Shepton Mallet*
16 MARCH	Practical lambing	*Skipton*
17 MARCH	Suckler cow management	*Dundee*
18 MARCH	Sheep lameness	*Norfolk*
19 MARCH	Managing the newly calved cow	*Hexham*
22 MARCH	Biosecurity	*Somerset*
22 MARCH	DIY AI	*Cheshire*
24 MARCH	Grow your heifers, grow your profits	*Cumbria*
24 MARCH	Safe use of veterinary medicines	*North Yorkshire*
31 MARCH	Heifer health from birth to weaning	*Derby*
31 MARCH	Dry cow, fresh cow	*Hereford*
31 MARCH	Nutrition for better fertility	*North Yorkshire*
1 APRIL	Health and production on organic farms	*Somerset*
1 APRIL	Veterinary health for broiler hens	*York*
7 APRIL	DIY AI	*Somerset*
14 APRIL	Calf rearing	*Shepton Mallet*
14 APRIL	DIY AI	*North Yorkshire*
16 APRIL	Biosecurity for egg producers	*York*
19 APRIL	Maximising beef performance	*Somerset*
19 APRIL	DIY AI	*Wales*
19 APRIL	DIY AI	*Cumbria*
19 APRIL	DIY AI	*North Yorkshire*

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