

# Plenty of advice at first UK dairy sheep and goat conference

THE MAJORITY OF LARGE ANIMAL PRACTICES are likely to have one or two sheep or goat milking units on the practice list. These units may be few in number but their veterinary requirements are specific and demanding.

Friars Moor Livestock Health of Sturminster Newton, Dorset, recognised that this important area of milk production was under-resourced and arranged the first UK Dairy Sheep and Goat Conference.

Initially it was thought that maybe 40 people would attend but the registrations soon climbed to 70 and, on the day, 50 vets attended plus 50 producers and 20 people from companies with an active interest.

Also launched was the Friars Moor Sheep and Goat Dairying Veterinary Consultancy and contacts have been developed with advisers overseas,

where commercial production issues are well recognised.

There were delegates from abroad who contributed to the discussions. The producers are enthusiastic about their businesses and were ready to clarify aspects raised by the speakers and challenge any figures that might lead to negative issues about sheep

and goat management. On many occasions it was highlighted that specific studies had not been carried out

and that data from other species and systems were cross-referenced.

Surveillance data are also lacking and veterinary surgeons were anxious to quantify the depth and breadth of clinical and production issues. It will be important for practices to collect UK-relevant information.

Anthony Wilkinson of Friars Moor opened the conference and

commented that the interest in quality food and its provenance is high and that the small ruminant sector has a great future.

## Data collection in Israel

Dr Haim Leibovich, small ruminant consultant, described the data collection and management criteria for production in Israel. Both sheep and goats have synchronised breeding (CIDR) with pregnancy diagnosis. From 5-8% of animals are found to be empty at PD. Sheep have two chances to get pregnant or they are culled. Goats that are not mated will produce milk for one to two years.

There are quotas for milk production which influences the management, as lower producing animals are kept for the value of the lamb. Quotas for milk are to be removed within two years. Lamb mortality is extremely important to the farmers and the lambs are reared artificially.

Only productive animals are kept with "no emotional considerations". Older animals are recognised to have a higher mortality rate of newborns.

There is a good cull price for ewes and with one to 2,000 ewe units, 50% would be replaced each year. Routine computerised tracking of each animal is normal and there is a wide range of



Sheep milking parlour [courtesy of DeLaval].

gross margin per animal from +14 to +115 across the range of monitored units.

Newborn lambs and kids, left with their dams, are likely to become infected with cryptosporidia, coccidia or coliforms. Lambs separated from the mothers have a greater survival rate.

Considerable effort goes into making contamination in the lambing areas as low as possible with clean bedding, disinfection, high levels of ventilation and burning the concrete floor between batches. At all stages cleanliness is emphasised as the lambs are transferred in their groups, with a gradual transition from milk powder to a whole grain diet.

Colostrum is quality-tested and fed from two to six hours after birth, milked out at day one, pasteurised and frozen. Ten per cent of bodyweight is fed within the first 24 hours and colostrum feeding continues for up to

## RICHARD GARD

reports from this inaugural event, set up by a livestock health company to discuss and tackle the big issues affecting the dairy industry



Yoav Alony Gilboa, David Harwood, Becky and Matt Van Der Borgh, and Haim Leibovich.



Mick Millar, Katherine Timms and Manuel Alejandro.

three days. Free access to clean, fresh water is provided throughout.

Yoav Alony Gilboa of Friars Moor addressed the local situation with **artificial rearing**. Pointing out that lambs and humans share the same temperature comfort zone, he assesses housing conditions by asking *are you happy to stand naked in the lambing area?*

Metabolic profiles are carried out at two to three weeks before the lambing or kidding season. Dams should have a good condition score of 3 to 3.5 prior to lambing or kidding. Slight underfeeding in the second trimester improves lamb weights at birth provided third trimester requirements are met.

It is important to observe that each lamb is feeding from the automatic feeder. Colostrum feeding is "so very important" combined with three **management supports of metabolic profiles, ration analysis and body condition scoring**.

David Harwood, consultant and chairman of the Goat Veterinary Society, emphasised the need for producers to vaccinate for clostridia. This bacterium leads to "unpredictable disease", produces toxin, has been recorded for over a century and is found widely in the environment.

Treatment of clinical cases is generally not successful. Goats have poor immunity following vaccination and require a booster every six months. Vaccination against enterotoxaemia and tetanus (four in one antigens) is required for all stock, including rams and bucks. A combined clostridia and Pasteurella product is fine for sheep but goat herds require a separate Pasteurella vaccine.

Strategic vaccination at six to two weeks before lambing is worthwhile. Lack of efficacy with vaccines in sheep and goats needs to be reported to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, as a suspected adverse reaction includes lack of efficacy.

### Advice not to trim sheep's hooves

Margit Groenevelt (Netherlands Veterinary Practice) highlighted that the sheep is a grazing animal and the goat browses, with a different hoof conformation. Current advice is not to trim hooves as this risks introducing disease to the healthy foot.

Within a dairy system, control of footrot is better achieved with hygiene, isolating infected animals, foot-bathing and culling. Some dairy goat herds have been recorded with a high incidence of lameness and the lesions appear differently to sheep lesions. Information on the relationship between nutrition and production is available but little on nutrition and health in small ruminant dairy systems.

Matt, chairman of the British Sheep Dairying Association, and Becky Van



**Friars Moor Consultancy team (from left): Lucy Hepworth, Sarah Eckett, Eleanor Price, Izzie Place, Yoav Alony Gilboa and Anthony Wilkinson.**

Der Borgh farm 120 Friesland ewes on 200 acres in Sussex. Health-assured tupes are obtained from Germany, the **flock lambs in March/April and the ewes produce 1.5 litres per day for 200 days.**

Frozen Pasteurised sheep milk is purchased online by the *wealthy well* and couriered overnight. Bagged raw milk is supplied to cheese makers and various flavours of ice cream are offered at a farmers' market.

Customers are encouraged to visit the farm. The aim is to provide an artisan product of the highest quality that retains its value and is consistent. Supply is shared with other artisans to provide an all-year-round service ([www.sheepdairy.co.uk](http://www.sheepdairy.co.uk)).

Mick Millar (University of Bristol) offered a comprehensive review of sheep and goat diseases. Utilising an electronic voting system, delegates were asked questions with one or more correct answers. Generally the responses were correct with various clues given out with the slides and video clips.

The overall summary included: don't co-graze sheep or goats with cattle, keep kids and lambs away from infected adults, do not pool colostrum, keep animals clean and specifically **target disease control measures at young animals for the first 30 days.** The prevalence of production-limiting diseases is available from VIDA but more information on small ruminant dairy incidence would be welcomed.

DeLaval International was principal sponsor of the event and brought a section of a goat/sheep milking parlour as an exhibit. Manuel Alejandro described the value of an automatic vacuum shut-off on milking performance and teat condition. The main advantages are to reduce the risk of overmilking and to increase throughput with larger units. Efficiently operated manual systems can perform equally to automation for yield and udder health.

Katherine Timms (Ceva Animal Health) described the use of Regulin (melatonin) to promote out-of-season

## Mastitis: training critical at drying off

TRAINING in the correct procedures around drying off and in teat sealant administration will be critically important as the number of UK dairy farms adopting selective dry cow therapy protocols increases, according to the latest meeting of the UK Mastitis Panel.

The panel, sponsored by MSD and representing practising dairy vets, research and government, agreed that while the use of selective dry cow therapy was at a relatively low level in UK dairy herds at the moment, a momentum was building that could see as many as half the nation's herds adopting the practice within a few years. But the panel considered that a lack of expertise at both farmer and vet level was currently a limiting factor.

Dr Martin Behr, technical manager at MSD who chairs the panel, said: "We know from our own training workshops with vets and farmers that the level of expertise in administering teat sealants, for example, is relatively low. Only about 30% of vets attending these workshops had any experience at all in administering a teat sealant."

The view from many on the panel was that there was a knowledge gap on farms when it comes to dry cow therapy protocols and that this presented a significant opportunity for veterinary practices.

breeding for all-year-round milk production.

The use of lights to mimic long days and then their withdrawal, to mimic shortening day length, plus melatonin, is being trialled. Information from farmers on the effects is being sought.

It is important that the ewes cannot smell or see the rams, including neighbouring stock, during the treatment period. Treated rams have increased spermatazoa but are not

always interested in ewes in oestrus out of season.

For pedigree breeders, rams can be born earlier in the year. The out of season breeding scheme works best with fit sheep and there is considerable breed variation.

The success and interest in this conference indicates that it is expected to become an annual event. Suggestions for future topics were requested from the delegates.