

PRACTICE NEWS (Claire)

Finally the rain has come (albeit slightly interrupting harvest)! The grass has started to grow and our Autumn calvers have started with a vengeance (see picture). Be aware of metabolic issues associated with a flush of grass if mild weather continues such as Grass Staggers (low magnesium) and Milk fever in fresh calvers. Parasite wise, there is a relatively low prevalence of fluke due to the dry summer, but clinical disease could start cropping up in sheep from the middle of September. There has been a lower level of disease from nematodes due to the dryness, but beware of a late peak now wet weather is returning. It would be recommended to faecal egg count your ewes pre-tupping to target your worm treatment according to SCOPS. September is typically the peak month for diagnosis of cattle lungworm so be aware,

and housing doses of wormer should be thought about to prevent risk of type 2 disease next Spring. Please let us know as soon as possible if you are interested in doing an AI refresher course. We are holding one on Tuesday 28th September, 10am until 3am (venue TBC). It will cost £125/person and we need confirmation asap. Please contact Claire with any questions.



Calving is in full swing for most of our clients now - here's a nice live heifer for Nick Bray after correcting a tricky head-back presentation

Copper poisoning in dairy cows (Ben)

I've been involved with an interesting case over the last few months that I wanted to share with you all. The supplementation of livestock diets with appropriate mineral levels is vital for efficient production, but as minerals are relatively cheap and levels can be easily altered in a diet it has become all too easy to look for the solution to complex problems in a bag of minerals. More often than not, the worst that can happen with over-supplementation is that you waste your money, but in the case of copper, you can actually do significant harm if animals are exposed to high levels of copper for prolonged periods. There has to be a good reason to up the copper levels in your diet. In cattle, excess dietary copper is absorbed and stored primarily in the liver. As the maximum storage capacity is reached some sort of stress factor (calving, metabolic problems, disease) can cause the release of a large amount of this copper from the liver stores into the bloodstream. High blood copper causes massive damage to red blood cells. In many cases the ability of red blood cells to carry oxygen around the body is reduced so much that the animals asphyxiate to death. Some case studies have described death rates of over 10% of animals in dairy herds.

So that's the theory – but what did we see in practice? Our client has around 200 cows on an autumn calving system. They feed a flat rate of 7kg of concentrate in the parlour over the winter. Their high mineral spec results in animals getting around 3 times the recommended level of copper. As the cows were dried off 2 younger animals aborted and died and when a third animal went off colour I was called in to see it. The animal was jaundiced, had a bloody discharge from its rectum and was looking pretty poorly. After a bit of treatment and a guarded prognosis I left and was pleased to hear that she seemed to recover well (and has since had a live heifer calf). I sent off some lab samples and they, along with the feeding history suggested copper poisoning. Unfortunately a few weeks later another animal was found dead. Post-mortem examination and lab examination of the liver showed copper poisoning was the cause. From reading other reports, heavily pregnant animals are the most likely to struggle with the disease. It is not a nice situation to be in as it is a bit of a ticking bomb – we know that other animals are likely to have high liver copper and the cows are approaching a stressful time (calving). There's not a lot we can do apart from minimising stress and keeping a close eye on the animals. Fingers crossed they can get through the calving season ok. So, be warned of upping your mineral spec without good reason – only increase copper supplementation if you have confirmed a specific problem, and by that I mean only if we have diagnosed a problem by means of screening the herd with liver biopsies.



Fatty infiltration of the liver at times of stress can trigger the release of liver copper stores—with disastrous consequences.

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Ram fertility testing (Maarten)

It is the time of year that people review their ram power and purchase new rams for the tupping season. It is worth realising that rams may represent only a small percentage of the breeding flock but they are responsible for 50% of the flock's fertility. Often people keep more rams as an "insurance" to cover for one or more infertile ones, but often infertile rams prevent the fertile ones from mating. This is particularly the case when these infertile rams are the older and more dominant ones.

I have started testing rams again this year. More and more people recognise the benefit of an annual ram fertility check, as rams can become sub-fertile at any age. Most farms spend a lot of time and money on feeding, worming, vaccinating and supplementing to improve the fertility of ewes, so why not also pay attention to ram fertility, which is equally important.

Summer Farm Walk (Maarten)

This year's TLP Summer farm Walk at Buddington Farm in Midhurst attracted a crowd of more than 60 people. After an introduction by the owner James Renwick, Bean Beanland from Isoenergy spoke on the different options available to farmers for generating alternative energy on farm.

The farm has seen a rise in annual yield from 7500L three years ago to 10500L today. This hasn't come without its challenges though especially with regards to fertility. Through hard work from the herdsman Ian Fermor, the calving-1st service interval and calving-conception interval has significantly improved in the last 12 months. This has resulted that the rise in milk/cow/year in line with the rise of 305d yields. Ian took us on a tour of the farm giving us an entertaining commentary on the different groups of cows and highlighting the pros and challenges of running a dairy on a multiple enterprise unit. A poignant moment being the cows and Ian looking longingly at irrigated 'no go' pasture!

The farm has been very successful in securing FRIP grants. A shedding gate and cluster flush is in place. Concrete has been grooved and a heat exchanger is on its way. Another thing that has been dealt with recently is the ventilation of the cubicle building to try to reduce environmental mastitis in the herd.

Debbie made a wonderful chilli con carne and trifle, both of which disappeared rapidly. We thoroughly enjoyed the evening and hope that everyone else did too.

Dairying For Profit Discussion Group (Sally)

The beautiful setting of Meon Springs hosted the August Dairying for Profit discussion group meeting where George Gordon, the managing Director of LKL, gave an excellent talk on the current issues surrounding labour in the dairy industry and how we can deal with them to improve prospects for the future. The main issues discussed were:

1. Ageing workforce – average age is over 50
2. Failure to attract young people, partly due to poor marketing of the industry
3. Hours worked – the working time directive vs. excessive hours in the dairy industry
4. Shortage of skilled people and semi-skilled people (even though we have lost over 20,000 dairy units there is still a labour shortage!)
5. People working in agriculture are 2.5 times more likely to injure themselves than in the construction industry (Quad bikes and Black and White bulls are the commonest causes). George also talked about larger units and the difficulties of managing a team of workers. The higher turnover of staff means they don't know the cows, the set up etc; Juniors in the team don't like being in charge when the head man is away; Acknowledgement work well done, praise given is a good morale booster; Good communication is essential and it is leadership qualities and man management skills that have a big impact on how the team works.

The final section was on recruitment – how to attract the best? In essence, ensure you are offering a good package. Amongst other things remember that the attitude of the employer (Positive outlook vs. constant doom and gloom) is a major factor. In summary, a lot to think about when looking for new staff and working out how to create a good team atmosphere – an excellent and thought provoking talk.

We also managed a quick look round Whitewool Farm, at ADF, the new rubber matting in the parlour and the successful new feed rail design. Apologies to all who attended for the lack of lunch – a misunderstanding between me and John – highlighting the point from George Gordon's talk on the importance of Good Communication!!