Farm Animal Practice

News

Langford Vets | University of BRISTOL

Smallholder
Spring/Summer 2023

Welcome to the Farm Animal Practice

As spring becomes summer, within the practice we will be shifting our attentions (and workload) from bringing lambs and calves into the world to welcoming cria, as well as planning for the grazing season.

This is a great time of year for us all to reflect on the successes and challenges of the winter months and to make plans for preventative healthcare by updating herd and flock health plans and thinking ahead to pasture and parasite management.

Along theme, thanks to all that came along to the preventative parasite management evening that we held at the practice in partnership with Norbrook. I hope that those who came enjoyed the informative talk, and weren't too alarmed by the pots of worms supplied by our pathology department!

As the year moves on, a few changes will be happening around the practice. We will see changes in student numbers spending time in the practice and some staffing changes in both the vet and admin team.

Throughout the summer we look forward to seeing you at the various events we have planned within the practice, as well as out and about.

Client Events

- **Tackling Redmite in Poultry** 1 June 2023 7pm
- **Free Stomach Pump Service and Repair Clinic** - 7 June 2023 11am-1pm
- **Sustainability in Farming (Kite Consulting)** - 27 June 2023 7pm
- **The Role of Footbathing in Cattle Lameness** - July 2023 12pm (CEVA Sponsored) Lunch Provided
- **Red Tractor Medicines Training and Certification** - 25 July 2023 1pm

www.langfordvets.co.uk/events

01934 852 650

Check out our Instagram

Follow us on social media!

@langfordfarmvets @langfordvetsfarm

Opening Hours: Mon - Fri 8.30am - 5pm

Telephone: 01934 852 650
24 hour emergency cover

Email us: farmpractice@langfordvets.co.uk

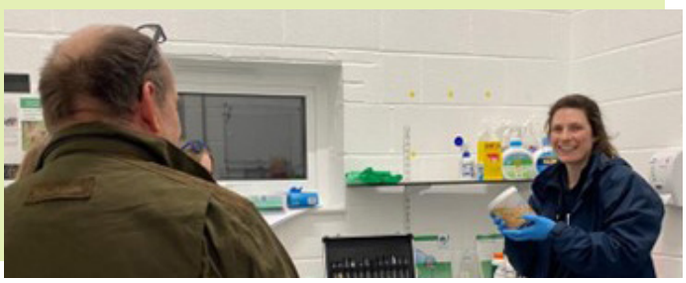
Web: langfordvets.co.uk/farm

Farm Animal Practice, Langford Vets,
Langford House, Langford, BS40 5DU

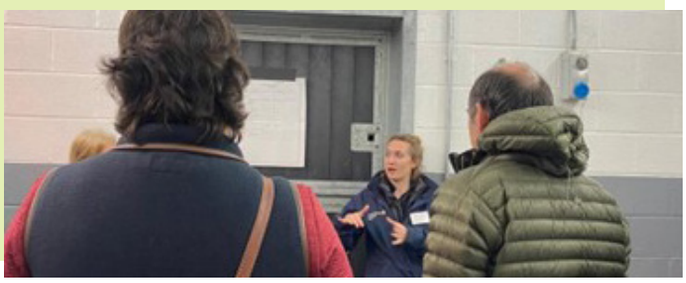
Parasite Planning and Preventative Health Calendars

It was great to see such a keen and enthusiastic bunch of smallholders join us for an evening meeting to learn about preventative parasite control back in March!

Together, we followed the journey of a parasitic gutworm through its lifecycle, and got hands-on with some practical skills too.



Did you know that it's larvae, rather than eggs, which are the infective stage of gutworms? So for worms to become infectious to other animals, their eggs must hatch out into larvae in dung, which then go through "shedding" stages to mature into infectious L3-stage larvae. This process is very dependent on external weather conditions, generally happening faster in warmer, wetter temperatures, whereas various clever worm tactics allow them to pause their development and "overwinter" on pasture or in the animals' gut if conditions are too cold.

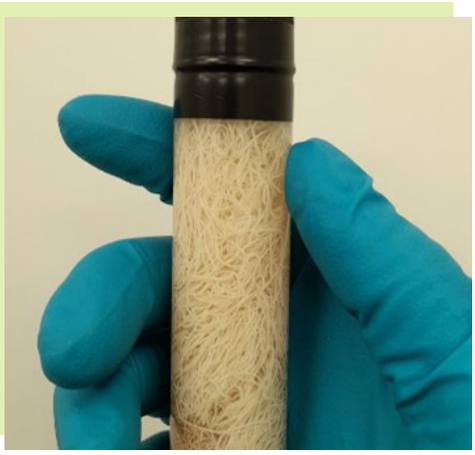


This last Winter was relatively mild, which meant the usual pause in parasite development didn't really happen! We continued to see developing and increasing worm burdens, particularly in sheep and goats, throughout the Winter. This took many farmers and livestock by surprise, and has made life particularly difficult for growing youngstock as well as pregnant females.

Everyone at our meeting had the chance to try faecal egg counting. This is usually our best tool for monitoring worm burdens and taking action before they cause serious problems. As we demonstrated with our pickled "worm museum" station, the nastiest worms are generally very small, so you won't see them with the naked eye in faeces! Egg counting is also a useful tool for checking how well different worming treatments perform by doing a drench test 10-14 days after worming. This technique uses salt solution to cause lightweight worm eggs to float, and be counted carefully using a grid on a slide under a microscope (McMasters method). With a little mathematics, this provides our overall "eggs per gram" of faeces, which we use to make treatment or management decisions.
If worming treatment is indicated, we need to be mindful of preventing resistance to wormer drugs from developing. This is an increasing problem in the UK, with multiple-resistance making some areas of land simply "un-farmable" for sheep. Luckily there are a range of simple steps you can take to reduce the chances of wormer resistance after treating, including:

- Using the right wormer at the right time
- Using the right worming dose and route of administration (those of you who came along in March got some good practice in for this!)
    - Clean, service and calibrate multiple-dosing guns regularly
    - Weigh your animals for accurate dose calculations
    - Get the full dose into the animal
- Leaving the healthiest 10% of a group untreated, to preserve some of the "susceptible" pre-treatment worms and avoid resistant worms from being the only ones left to repopulate

The good news is that you don't need to face this on your own. Our vets can help you decide what is best for your individual flock or herd, as they're all different and advice will vary. We come in particularly handy for interpreting results, training you to give medicines effectively and building personalised Health Planning Calendars. These calendars give you a month-by-month to-do list, which you can also opt to receive as text reminders so nothing gets forgotten in your busy lives! Get in touch if this is something we can help you with.



Staffing Update

We will be saying Goodbye to Izzi in mid-July; since she initially only joined the practice on a 1 year contract we were lucky to keep her for two, but now she will be moving on to pastures new (New Zealand pastures in fact!) and we wish her all the best in her career as a farm vet.

As a result of Izzi's departure, Sarah Wood will be doing more work for the practice so keep an eye out for her out on your farms and holdings a bit more going forwards!

Receptionist Maddy will be going on maternity leave starting in July (congratulations to her and her partner Rob!). As a result, we are recruiting a maternity leave cover for Maddy's full time role in the practice.

Student Update

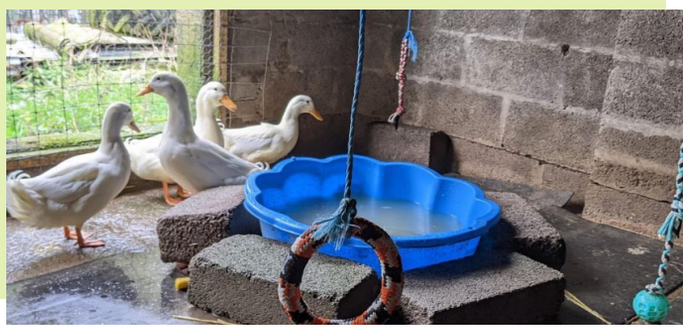
As part of a change in curriculum requiring students to see more 'first opinion' practice, all final year students will spend more time on farm animal rotations, great news for our farm vets of the future! To support this, students will not only be spending time with the Langford team but also with other practices in the local area. As a result the numbers of students seeing practice with our farm practice will reduce from 8 to 6 a day.

Despite this change the number of weeks the students spend in farm animal practices in their final year is still relatively small and so we, and they, really appreciate all opportunities for learning that you help us provide with the cases we see on your farms and holdings.

How to Charm a Chicken

I am sure that anyone with chickens or poultry was relieved when the national 'flockdown' restrictions were lifted on April 18th. We are aware that it felt like a very long winter of keeping your birds under cover to satisfy the restrictions. In that time many poultry keepers on our rounds asked for ideas to prevent boredom in their birds, which can often present as aggression, feather-pecking and weight loss.

Despite the fact that the 'flockdown' restrictions have now been lifted, you never know when you might need to keep a bird or a group of birds restricted due to sickness, injury, predation or possibly another national Avian Influenza related restriction being put in place in the future.



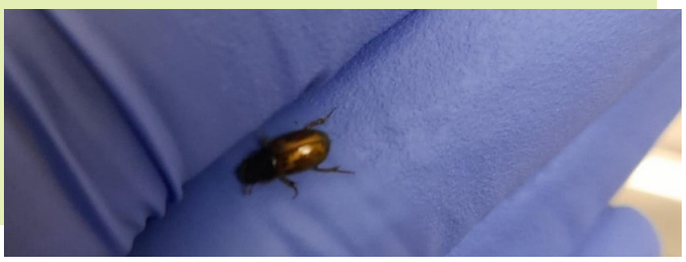
Here are some ideas to keep your birds out of trouble whilst they're in flockdown:

- Space – overcrowding increases the chances of disagreements in your flock.
- Natural light is best if possible, or if not, artificial lights should follow typical day/night patterns.
- Avoid group changes or buying-in whilst birds are housed if possible.
- Provide plenty of perches at different heights (over 40cm high to avoid bird beak-level).
- Build a dustbath, filled with litter and diatomaceous earth (this will also help prevent skin parasites). An old tyre works well to contain it.
- Use treat puzzles to encourage foraging.
- Hang string (natural fibres only), old egg cartons, vegetables or alfalfa treat blocks from the ceiling for hens to peck at. You can use a regular hay net to hang up a variety of objects.
- Toys such as footballs, see-saws, bells, xylophones and mirrors can help with entertainment.
- Put the radio on. The search is on for the nation's chickens' favourite station! Mine can't stop talking about 'Bach' (sorry).

We'd love to see what you do to keep your chooks cheerful. Send us your photos and we might even give you a shout out on our social media channels!

Thinking about the Dung Beetle

Dung beetles are the fantastic little workers who depend on sources of animal dung to survive. They are on your side to improve dung breakdown and transport organic fertiliser (dung!) down into soil in a far more efficient way than weathering. This has been shown to improve soil health and plant nutrients, reduce fly and worm populations and increase biodiversity. It had been estimated that dung beetles save the UK cattle industry approx. £367m each year! (Beynon et al. 2015)



There are 60 species of dung beetle in the UK of which >50% are deemed scarce or threatened (Lane and Mann, 2016). As land use has changed for development, arable only or increased rotational pasture, dung beetles have become far more threatened as their food source is disappearing from some areas. Dung beetles heavily depend on livestock farmers to survive.

Unfortunately, the use of certain anti-parasite treatments can have a detrimental effect on insects within our environments, including dung beetles and their larvae. Clear wormers (Avermectins/Macrocylic Lactones) and certain fly products (pyrethroids) are insecticides which of course work well on our targets such as gut worms and mites, but also are shown to be toxic to insects in the wider environment (Finch et al. 2020).

Ivermectin, for example, remained very stable and is not broken down by the body. Regardless of what route of administration is used, much of the drug is passed in the dung unchanged, up to 62-90% dependent on the study (Canga et al. 2007). This is where it will affect our friend the dung beetle the most!

Animal welfare remains our top priority and we still need to worm our animals, but let's treat our livestock while thinking about sustainable and responsible worming:

- Prevent

Using a farm specific prevention plan to reduce overall worm burden on your farm can help reduce wormer use. This could vary from improved nutrition, vaccination for lungworm and other disease to improve stock health, incorporating tannin dense plants e.g. chicory into pastures and grazing longer sward lengths.

- **Assess**

Know that you have a worm burden before treatment. Unnecessary treatment of animals with low to no burden is bad for wormer resistance, your pocket, your time and environmental insects. Regular worm egg counts, monitoring growth rates and blood testing can all be used as data to support whether to treat.

- **Treat**

Once we know we need to treat, try to choose a product with less impact. Long acting products should be avoided. White and yellow wormers appear to have less impact on environmental insects than clear wormers. Talk to your vet!

If you would like to do some further reading about dung beetles and how you can help, more information can be found on:

www.DungBeetlesForFarmers.co.uk