

# Farm Animal Practice News

Langford Vets 

 University of  
BRISTOL

Farmer  
Spring 2024

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Free client meeting - 24 April 2024

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Spaces are limited, book early on:  
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## Welcome to the Farm Animal Practice

The new year has been a busy one for the farm animal practice with a practical lambing day hosted by Scarlett, an evening meeting looking at measuring passive transfer in calves hosted by Andrea and a chicken webinar hosted by Sarah.

All this as well as a number of referral cases coming into our inpatient facility, a CPD event for other farm vets and the fact that lambing is well underway! And with all that already behind us I'm sure getting various jobs done before turnout comes around will be keeping us all busy going forward!

In this newsletter, as well as some reflections on the meetings we have hosted, we are thinking ahead to trouble-shooting at turnout, including preventing bloat and hypomagnesaemia, read on to find out more!

## Spring Jobs

**Huskvac** for any first or second season grazers (or bought in animals) due to be turned out onto lungworm infected pastures.



**Clostridial disease vaccines** only need to save one death to be value for money, vaccinate youngstock cattle in particular before turnout.

**Growing lambs** can be prone to *Pasteurella pneumonia* and susceptible when maternal immunity wains, vaccinating with a clostridial vaccine containing *pasteurella cover* can prevent these losses.

**Overwintered fluke** (or those that have survived on the pastures in the mild weather) can cause disease in sheep / camelids in late winter, testing or treating those on known high risk pastures should be done at this time of year.

**Trace element bolusing** of cattle and sheep should be done before turnout to prevent deficiencies while out grazing (testing can be done first to check animal trace element status).

## Best Start for Calves

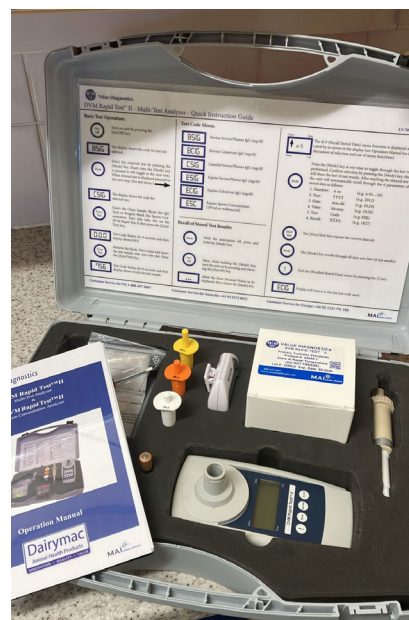
Thanks to all who came along to our 'best start for calves' meeting, hosted by Andrea alongside BIMEDA on the 8th Feb. At this meeting we discussed the fact that up to 1 in 4 dairy and 1 in 3 beef calves could benefit from more / better colostrum and that farms that monitor colostrum intakes were more likely to have lower rates of failure of passive transfer in their calves (and all associated health and production benefits).



During the evening, new on-farm IgG testing equipment available from BIMEDA was discussed as well as our new in-house IgG testing machine that we now have here at the farm animal practice (more information below). It was a good evening of discussion and hopefully learning. Thanks to all that came along.

## IgG Testing Machine - Calves and Crias

This year as a practice we have invested in a new and exciting piece of kit, an in-house IgG testing machine. This allows us to run same-day IgG testing for calves and Cria (both of which we have test kits for). These competitively priced tests allow us to offer new solutions to old problems with accurate testing and quick turnaround times to help you make the best decisions for your animals.



## Preventing bloat at turnout

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As the weather improves and livestock are being turned out to graze, it's important to be aware of the potential problems that can be seen soon after turnout. Bloat is one of the more common issues seen, characterised by a distended left abdomen, and can be categorised as 'gassy' or 'frothy'.

'Gassy bloat' is caused when the gas produced in the rumen builds up and cannot be released by burping (eructation). This can happen due to a variety of reasons, from a physical blockage in the oesophagus, to damage to the nerves that control eructation.

'Frothy bloat' is caused by an overproduction of froth in the rumen, forming a layer on top of the rumen liquid, and preventing gas from escaping. This froth is produced from the digestion of fast growing forages, especially clover and alfalfa. This means that frothy bloat is by far the more common type of bloat seen just after turnout.



**Bloat** is life-threatening, as the distended rumen presses on the lungs, blood vessels and other internal structures. Animals will be visibly uncomfortable, kick at their abdomen, and show signs of respiratory distress (neck stretched out, open-mouth breathing) as the condition worsens. Death can occur in as little as 15 minutes of the onset of clinical signs, so prompt action is needed.

Differentiate between gassy bloat and frothy bloat by passing a stomach tube (if you have one). For a case of gassy bloat, this may release the trapped gas, alleviating the clinical signs almost immediately.

Frothy bloat can be treated with anti-foaming agents – this includes liquid paraffin or even vegetable oils from your kitchen cupboard!

If there is no change in the animal after this, call the vet! A trocar may need to be placed in the side of the animal to release gas that could not be released via stomach tube, or, in severe cases, the vet may need to carry out an emergency rumenotomy (surgically opening the rumen to manually remove froth and trapped rumen material)

Frothy bloat is likely to affect more than one animal in the group. After an outbreak of frothy bloat occurs, the National Animal Disease Information Service (NADIS) recommends removing all animals from that pasture for at least 10 days.



As the saying goes, "prevention is better than cure!", so just a little extra planning around turnout can go a long way.

Where are your high-risk pastures? These will be very lush with a high clover content, or you may have had problems with bloat there in previous years. Check the weather forecast too, as the risk further increases when high-risk pastures are wet.

Can you limit grazing at turnout (and therefore limit the amount of froth-producing forage eaten)? This might include strip grazing, grazing only for a limited time each day, or turning out late afternoon/at night, (as cattle are known to eat more early in the morning) so animals will not graze too much too quickly.

Continue to provide plenty of fibre, both before and after turnout. Not only will this 'stagger' the change in diet and allow the rumen to adapt, but high fibre also promotes saliva production, which seems to lower the risk of bloat.

## Hypomagnesaemia

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Clinical disease as a result of low levels of magnesium in the blood is another issue commonly seen around spring turnout in both sheep and cattle – the medical term is 'hypomagnesaemia', but the syndrome in farm animals is also known by 'grass staggers' or 'grass tetany'. As the name suggests, low magnesium manifests as neurological disease, with affected animals showing a staggering, in coordinated gait before collapsing. Their behaviour will change, and often behave as though "on edge", twitching and overreacting to nearby noises, touch, or being approached. Excessive urination and defecation has also been reported in these cases. Other animals may present simply as down, particularly recently calved cows who might have concurrent low calcium levels preventing them from rising.

## Why am I seeing staggers cases in my herd or flock?

There could be a number of reasons why a particular animal succumbs to grass staggers. Recently calved cows and lactating ewes are already under metabolic stress, and so are a high risk group. Stressed animals will eat less and may become deficient that way.

The pasture is also a key factor, but this isn't always straightforward - staggers cases don't necessarily mean that your pasture is low in magnesium!



High nitrogen and potassium content - both of these decrease the rumen's ability to absorb magnesium. Pasture will typically be high in these if it has been fertilised with a high potash fertiliser or poultry manure.

Lush, rapidly growing spring grass can be poorly nutritious. There may be adequate magnesium in the soil, but this hasn't been properly absorbed by the grass.

Lush grass also reduces gut transit time - very loose stools are a common sight when animals graze on it. Even if the food is nutritious, if it passes through the gastrointestinal tract too quickly, there is less time for those nutrients to be properly absorbed.

The two main strategies for preventing cases of hypomagnesaemia will be to increase magnesium intake, and to maximise the magnesium absorbed via the rumen. Magnesium chloride ("mag flakes") can be added to feed or water but is very unpalatable if not mixed in thoroughly. High fibre forage slows down gut transit time, allowing for more nutrients to be absorbed.

## An animal is having a seizure - what do I do?!

In severe cases, hypomagnesaemia can cause animals to seizure - this is not only extremely distressing for the animal and the keeper witnessing it, but in the case of cattle, it is also incredibly dangerous. NEVER put yourself in harm's way. If the animal is lying on its side, and you feel confident administering magnesium under the skin, the safest way of doing this is by approaching the animal's spine, as far away as

possible from the thrashing legs. Put the needle under the skin over the ribs and use a flutter valve so you can then stand back as the magnesium is being delivered. But, if there is any doubt, ALWAYS prioritise your own safety.

If an animal is showing early clinical signs, you should contact your vet and then start treatment as soon as possible, giving magnesium under the skin and calcium into the vein or under the skin. BE CAREFUL though - these animals will be balancing on a knife edge, and loud and stressful handling may trigger a seizure.

## An animal has suddenly been found dead - could it be hypomagnesaemia?

Note that, in the first instance, unexplained sudden death may warrant anthrax testing before any further investigations. Churned up ground around a dead animal, however, may be clue that it died after a seizure, and hypomagnesaemia may be the cause. In a live animal, a blood test will determine magnesium serum levels, but this actually becomes an inaccurate test post mortem.

The gold standard is to instead test the aqueous humour - the fluid inside the eyeball. If you suspect an animal has died of hypomagnesaemia, it's a good idea to cover the head to stop birds getting to it before your vet can take the sample! Your vet may also want to take blood samples from other live animals in that group - as the disease can progress quickly, it's essential to know if the rest of the group have 'subclinical' levels of magnesium and need preventative treatment.



## Nematodirus Warning

While Nematodirus is typically problematic in late spring, APHA have confirmed a positive case in the south west in February this year.

There are useful resources like the SCOPS Nematodirus forecast to help you assess if, and when, your lambs might benefit from a 1-BZ wormer before Nematodirus strikes.

[www.scops.org.uk/forecasts/nematodirus-forecast](http://www.scops.org.uk/forecasts/nematodirus-forecast)