

PRACTICE NEWS

2024 Lambing Workshop Success

At the beginning of February, vets Rachel and Rosie ran our annual lambing workshop, hosted by active Flock Health Club members the Thomas family on their farm in St Ives. They had just finished lambing the first group of their 120-ewe flock, and were due to start on the second half any day. Therefore, there were plenty of lambs to entertain everyone!

The evening started with a talk from Rachel and Rosie, covering the management of pregnant ewes, preparing for lambing, complications pre-lambing, complications at lambing, the care of neonatal lambs and complications post-lambing. There was a short pasty break part way through, provided by CEVA, the sponsors of the event, and their representative, Kate. She spoke to the attendees about the common causes of abortion and the diagnostics and preventative vaccinations available through CEVA.

Once the talking was done, attendees were given the opportunity to get hands-on. There was a lambing simulator onsite to practise correcting mal-presentations, and carcasses were used to practise placing a feeding tube, injecting muscle and under the skin and giving an intra-peritoneal shot of glucose.



The workshop was free to attend for Flock Health Club members. Also included in this membership is:

- An annual advisory/health plan visit of up to 60 minutes.
- Discounted Veterinary Attestation certificate.
- Four discounted, in-house faecal egg counts per year.
- Discounted preventative medicines, including all vaccines and worm treatments.
- Quarterly newsletter.
- Access to a private group chat consisting of members and vets.

In the upcoming year, the club will be getting to know all the “iceberg diseases” and learning how to recognise different mineral deficiencies, what to include in pre-tupping checks and the benefits of synchronisation.

The advantages of post-mortem examination

The health status of a farm is very important for economic and welfare reasons. By knowing the issues of your farm, we can work with you to establish preventative measures (agile health planning!) and reduce losses.

Farm animal post-mortem examinations are not used often enough, but they are a very helpful tool to investigate outbreaks of disease. Without the limitations of dealing with a living animal, during a post mortem we can thoroughly search for changes associated with disease and take a different array of samples to try to reach a diagnosis. Many diseases have similar signs of illness, so often a well performed exam with appropriate samples taken is the only way to identify which disease we are dealing with. This can give us very valuable information, not just about the animal that died, but about the remaining members of the herd or flock as well. It can also tell us whether a single death is the first sign of a major outbreak or just a one-off case.

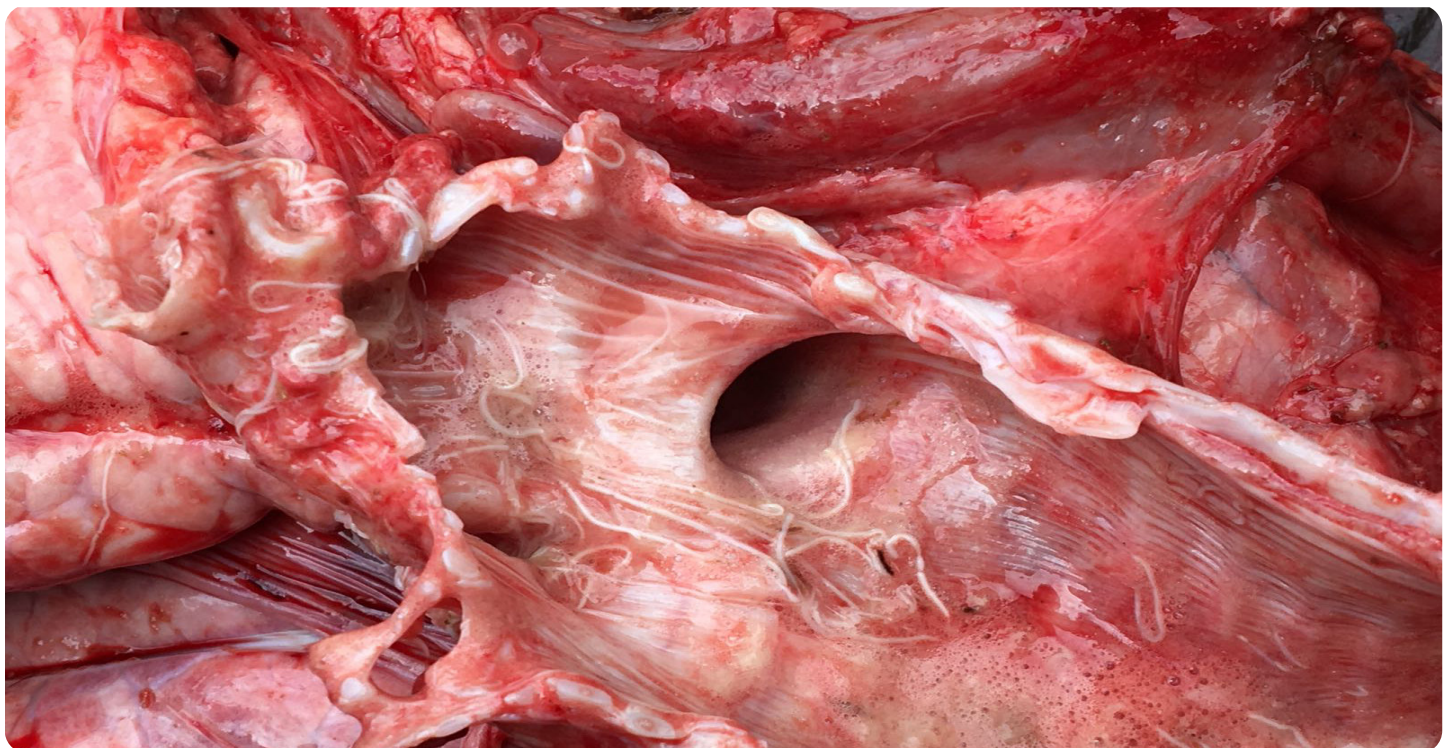
Some conditions that can heavily affect the profitability of your farm, such as certain trace element deficiencies, worm infestation and certain viral/bacterial infections, can be identified straight away with a post mortem on farm. For example, white muscle disease (selenium deficiency), with clear patterns of white coloration in the muscle, can be identified almost immediately. Worm infestation, with the presence of high number of adult worms in the gut is another example. The causative agents of

pneumonia can often be diagnosed based on lesion patterns in the lungs. Taking appropriate samples can confirm and support any diagnosis made.

A good post-mortem diagnosis is based on the presence of specific lesions that correlate with a thorough clinical history. Bear in mind that a fresh carcase is always best and will lead to more reliable findings. Some diseases and conditions have non-specific lesions and can be difficult to fully diagnose on post mortem, such as allergy, post vaccine reaction, stroke, some kinds of poisoning and heart attack.

Post mortems can benefit both you and your vet by providing information specific to your farm. Together, you can work on measures to prevent this problem in the future, as well as developing specific treatment protocols. It is the perfect way to identify things that could have been done differently for a better outcome. Remember that a post mortem doesn't have to show any clear diagnosis to be useful - many negative or unclear exams will result in ruling out of some main diseases, again narrowing down the options for an action plan. Everything is used to inform ongoing flock and herd health.

Speak to your vet or the practice if you want to book in a post mortem exam - time is crucial, so the sooner you contact us the better.



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Gut Instincts: Navigating the battle against small ruminant

Controlling gastrointestinal parasites is paramount in ensuring the well-being and productivity of small ruminants. Small ruminants, such as sheep and goats, are susceptible to a variety of internal parasites that can significantly impact their health and productivity. Implementing effective parasite control strategies is essential for maintaining a thriving flock or herd.

Gastrointestinal parasites, including worms like nematodes and cestodes, can wreak havoc on the digestive system of small ruminants. These parasites thrive in the digestive tract, causing issues such as weight loss, diarrhoea, and decreased overall performance. Implementing a comprehensive, integrated parasite control program is crucial for ensuring the welfare of the animals.

This strategy involves a combination of practices to minimise the risk of parasitic infections. Pasture management, strategic treatment, and regular monitoring are essential components of an effective integrated parasite management plan. [England only - If you qualify for an Animal Health and Welfare Review, we can create an integrated plan for you as part of the visit, call the practice for more information on this]

Regular Monitoring:

Regular monitoring for parasites is critical for early detection of infection. Faecal egg counts and overall health assessments are valuable tools in gauging the effectiveness of parasite control measures. Identifying potential issues promptly allows for timely intervention, preventing the escalation of parasite-related problems. It can also highlight if you DON'T need to treat - saving you time and money, and reducing the risk of anthelmintic resistance.



Pasture Management:

Pasture contamination is a primary source of gastrointestinal parasites. Consider rotational grazing, where animals are moved to fresh pastures regularly. This helps break the life cycle of parasites by interrupting their access to host animals - a simple yet effective practice which reduces the risk of infection and promotes a healthier environment livestock.

Strategic Worming:

Strategic deworming involves administering anthelmintic treatments to animals at specific times, targeting the most vulnerable periods in the parasite life cycle according to your own holding risk. Working closely with your vet, you can develop a schedule tailored to your specific needs taking into account weather, pasture type and current health status. Overreliance on anthelmintics, however, can contribute to drug resistance, therefore it's also important to regularly monitor - which can also save you money.

In addition to conventional approaches, exploring alternative control methods can complement an integrated parasite management strategy. This may include incorporating forage plants with natural anti-parasitic properties into the diet, promoting a resilient immune response in the animals.

Controlling gastrointestinal parasites in sheep, goats and camelids requires a multifaceted approach. By integrating pasture management, strategic worming, regular monitoring, and exploring alternative control



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methods, you can significantly reduce the impact of internal parasites in your flock or herd. Collaborating with veterinarians and staying informed about emerging research ensures that small ruminant owners can adapt their parasite control strategies to evolving challenges, promoting the long-term health and productivity of their animals.

Farm dog and cat worming

A reminder that regular worming for farm cats and dogs is vital to maintaining both their health and yours. As a result of recent changes to the regulations, your vet will need to examine any cats or dogs before they can prescribe parasite treatments for them. Worms can pass from pets to humans and other animals, including your stock and can cause serious illness:

- Did you know that over £4.1million was lost to the English sheep industry alone in 2015 due to sheep measles (tapeworm) being found in carcasses?
- In the same year over £400,000 was lost due to sheep bladder worm (another tapeworm disease)
- Finding the tapeworm *Echinococcus granulosus* in sheep and cattle carcasses leads to carcase rejection and economic loss.

And don't forget the impact of toxoplasmosis spread by farm cats to sheep, goats and swine. Worming treatments won't kill this parasite, however maintaining a healthy feline population on farm can keep shedding to a minimum reducing the risk of spread.

(Source: AHDB - <https://media.ahdb.org.uk/media/Default/Imported%20Publication%20Docs/Abattoir-post-mortem-conditions-guide.pdf>)

How are these diseases spread on farm?

A widespread cycle that exists is between dogs (including foxes) and sheep. When dogs are fed fresh offal or scavenge infected sheep carcasses containing tapeworm cysts, they become infected without ill effect. Dogs contaminate the pasture

with tapeworm segments in their faeces, and the eggs are then scattered by wind and water. Sheep can be infected as they graze. Risk factors that can expose animals to infective eggs include grazing on land that has been contaminated with infected dogs' faeces. Dogs are a key risk as they can carry the tapeworm without showing any sign of infection.

To reduce this risk, the tapeworm's lifecycle can be broken by:

- Regularly worming all working and visiting dogs for tapeworm
- Fencing off public footpaths
- Not feeding dogs with raw offal or allowing them to scavenge on carcasses
- Rapidly and effectively disposing of dead sheep to stop scavenging
- Encouraging dog owners to pick up their dogs' faeces



Think about fluke control ahead of cattle turnout

Last year, the cold snaps we had in weather weren't quite enough to reduce the risk of liver fluke for cattle being turned out in the Spring. This was followed by unpredictable weather throughout the year, with an early summer, wet deluge in July and August, topped with a mini heatwave in September. These unusual weather conditions affected the fluke lifecycle meaning the risk of fluke going into the Winter months was lower than normal. However, it's still a risk factor when turning out and increasingly so with such turbulent weather patterns.

Liver fluke is estimated to cost the UK cattle industry up to £40m a year, due to its negative effects on growth rates and milk yield. To control fluke, you need to pay close attention to diagnostic testing, flukicide choice, pasture contamination, weather conditions, and the quarantine of any new or moving stock.

Testing is paramount because it ensures treatment is necessary and cattle are treated at the right time. Testing also allows us to make more informed decisions on what products we use to treat cattle, if treatment is required at all.

The key testing methods include blood tests which can be used to identify fluke two to four weeks post-

infection in first-season grazing animals, and faecal tests including fluke copro-antigen tests which can identify adult and late immature fluke, and a fluke egg count (FEC) test which identifies the presence of adult fluke. Around turnout at this time of the year however, a copro-antigen or FEC test is more appropriate than a blood test.

Where treatment is required ahead of turnout due to positive test results, it is likely to focus on treating late immature and adult fluke, given that cattle will likely have been housed for a period of weeks.

Because liver fluke is dependent on land type, you should consider talking to your vet about developing a parasite control plan, for the grazing season ahead. A plan will allow you and your vet to identify risks, determine whether vaccination is required for lungworm, discuss when diagnostic tests need to be performed for different parasites, and identify pastures which may be high risk in terms of parasites. Give us a call at the practice to book in a parasite control planning session



If you would like more information on what we've discussed in this month's newsletter, please speak to any of our farm veterinary team.

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