



## Our Team



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## Living And Working In Your Community

December 2020

Hello and welcome to the December Newsletter.

I hope you are all feeling festive, determined to make the most of any merriment on offer! It has been a very challenging year, both professionally and personally and I am sure that many of you will agree that 2020 can sod off on 31st December, it won't be missed. Things are looking up for 2021 with the prospect of vaccinations all round and possibly a return to a semblance of normality.

November provided us with some classic pneumonia weather – warm and wet, cold and windy. Prevention is always better than cure – put a note in the diary for next September for respiratory vaccines. The warmth has allowed the worm and fluke burden to be maintained – there needs to be an average day and night temperature of  $<10^{\circ}\text{C}$  to arrest the lifecycles and so far, we are nowhere near.

This month, Rhian and Tom are going on a course to learn how to perform AI in sheep – something that they have both wanted to do for a while and have only just managed to find someone to share the magic. Watch this space. Morgan has been doing a prescribing champions course for the last few months – I think it's been less dry than it sounds, it has involved meeting colleagues from all the practices in the south of Wales (online of course) and sharing best practice. Russell has started our new nutritional service – beef and sheep, see the flyer included.

We are allowing students back from December for 'seeing practice'. There are some strict rules for them – they must be COVID tested, or quarantined from uni, they will travel separately from us and will maintain social distancing on farm. It is a vital part of student life, I still remember the many lessons I learned from Ron, Allen and Simon – about veterinary science and also social skills/professional manners, so we are keen to try to help the next generation. If you particularly do not want any extra bodies on farm, just let us know please. All that is left to say this year is I hope you have a very Happy and Safe Christmas, roll on 2021.

Mary

### Lameness in Dairy Cattle

Approximately 70% of lameness in the UK can be attributed to one of the following three lesions; sole ulcer, white line disease or digital dermatitis. Here are some of the common risk factors for each lesion and what can be done to help prevent them.

**Sole Ulcer** (sole bruising, sole haemorrhage) are considered the SU (Standing Up) disease. They develop as a result of excess forces pushing through the foot, reduced horn growth and excess wear. Ideally cows need to lie down for over 12 hours a day.

To encourage this consider cubicle access—at least 1 cubicle per cow, and avoiding dead ends in the shed. Deep, comfortable beds and mattresses also improve lying times, along with correctly sized cubicles and lunge space (dimensions are available on AHDB Dairy).

Queueing should also be limited—smaller groups and an efficient milking routine will reduce standing times in the collecting yard. Sufficient feed access (minimum 60cm per cow) and water access (minimum 10cm per cow) limits waiting times for these essential nutrients. Rubber matting can also be fitted in the parlour, at feed faces and on any sharp turns to increase support for the foot.

Dry cows and fresh calvers are particularly at risk, as the mechanism that relaxes the vulva, allowing them to give birth, also relaxes the attachment of the pedal bone (P3) inside the hoof. This increases the pressure from P3 on the corium (quick), damaging horn production on the sole and it is this damaged patch which later becomes the ulcer—explaining why they almost always occur at the same site.

Cows have their own natural support system—the digital cushion. This is a pad of fat that supports P3, limiting movement, which prevents damage to the horn. The digital cushion is only fully developed in



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animals once they are 3 years old, meaning that heifers need extra help. Exposing heifers to concrete during rearing encourages development of the cushion, whilst cubicle training will improve lying times. It is also known that thin cows (BCS <2) have a thinner digital cushion, so may need drying off early to recover body condition before calving. Finally, forces can be reduced by having a well-shaped foot—both genetic conformation and properly trimmed.

**White line disease** is a result of shear forces separating the wall of the hoof leading to haemorrhage and infection. It typically occurs close to the heel.

Reducing the risk relies on improving cow flow i.e. a direct route at the cow's own speed. Where possible tight turns should be avoided but if necessary, good concrete grooving, or rubber matting can reduce slipping and improve cow confidence. This will mean they move faster and don't need pushing.

Cows should be allowed to move at their own speed—they have natural leaders and a natural order. Where movement is forced e.g. over enthusiastic 'help' or a backing gate, they will fall out of their natural order, causing turns and slipping, which may slow progress, along with damaging their feet.

In grazed cows, tracks need to be smooth and wide, with astroturf being a good option. The cows will tell you their opinion of the track—if they are single file along the edge, they don't like it and they are trying to tell you some remedial work is needed. Finally, where cows are forever getting stones in the white line, additional biotin in the diet can improve hoof quality. However, this is an expensive option and it is usually better to invest in the tracks and gateways in the long term.

**Digital dermatitis** (DD, digi, hairy warts) is the most common lesion in dairy cattle and is caused by spiral shaped bacteria—treponemes. Wet, damaged skin, particularly with high exposure to slurry, allows the treponemes to invade, and lesions are commonly seen on the interdigital skin at the heel.

Key to control is slurry management. The slurry acts as a reservoir of infection, and the wet, acidic conditions are perfect for damaging the skin. Regular scraping, wide passageways and good ventilation in the shed all act to reduce slurry and moisture build-up, reducing the infection risk. Be aware that poached grazing e.g. gateways can provide all the same risks for digital dermatitis.

Introducing new animals into the herd always presents a risk—new cows may be bringing DD in for the first time, or replacement heifers may still be naïve, and so at risk of severe disease. There is also the risk of spread when stock are collected e.g. TB testing.

Control relies on footbathing, as many 'normal' cows will have dormant DD lesions waiting to reactivate. Regular, which on some farms is every day, footbathing, will limit the number of active lesions in the herd, limiting the spread. It is important not to forget dry cows and in calf heifers, to prevent DD buildup in these groups. As a minimum, a footbath needs to be 3m (10 feet) long, so each foot is dunked 2-3 times.

This is a brief overview of some of the more common conditions. We have AHDB Mobility Mentors in the vet team, so if you have any lameness concerns, please get in touch with the practice.



### Farm assurance inspections (FAWL)

Farm assurance inspections have resumed on farm since relaxation of COVID restrictions and we have seen a number of noncompliance failures. A little prior preparation can encourage a smooth visit and ease the stress involved. Common reasons for non-compliance on livestock farms are often simple and easily rectified.

**Medicine records:** Ensure these are up to date, including animal identification and withdrawal dates. Also check the medicine cupboard to ensure they are within date and correctly recorded in the medicine book.

**Health plans:** Important that you can find it and it's complete, including a biosecurity plan.

**FAWL review:** A health and welfare review must have been completed by a vet within 12 months of the inspection. A health & welfare review is not as painful as it sounds!

One of the vets needs to examine the health plan and review the medicine records to ensure appropriate biosecurity, correct timings and use of medicines for the right conditions. They then complete the review form ready for your inspection. Contact the practice if you have any questions or are due your farm assurance inspection.

#### Top 10 non-compliance reasons:

1. Inadequate/incomplete medicine record
2. Inadequate/incomplete health plan
3. Inadequate/incomplete written manure management plan
4. Medicines inappropriately stored
5. Inadequate biosecurity plan/measures
6. No dog/cat worming records
7. Inadequate/inappropriate housing
8. Inadequate/incomplete purchased feed records
9. Inadequate handling facilities
10. Feed stored inappropriately