

Hello and welcome to the February newsletter. A slightly drier month in January, thank goodness, although we've had our fair share of storms!

Last month, I went on a course about our part in the new Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) – the AHIC – animal health improvement cycle. I am part of a pilot scheme this year, recruiting 3 of our farms to take part. It is a collaborative process – farmer and vet selecting together one or two health issues that require some attention on the farm and planning actions to improve the current situation. For example, the issue may be wanting to increase number of lambs sold, the conversation +/- testing may show that deaths within 24 hours are contributing the most and then the plan may be to improve hygiene by cleaning pens between lambings. It can be that simple. All decisions are made by both farmer and vet. The farmer is then left to put the plan into action, and there is a review at a later date – at which point, the cycle starts again!

The AHIC is one of (currently) 17 points on the SFS and I think it may be one of the most helpful ones, one that many of you are doing anyway, this just formalizes it. Not all plans work, you only have to demonstrate that you have put the action plans into place.

There is a consultation document - <https://www.gov.wales/sustainable-farming-scheme-consultation>. If you want to have a look and then have your say.

This month, Russell is leading a meeting on transition cow management by kind permission of the Lougher family at Ty Tangwylst Farm. Tom has his annual lambing course at Pencoed College – promising to be another successful, fully subscribed day.

It's quite noticeable how the evenings are drawing out now – looking forward to longer days.

Mary

Possible causes of abortion in Cattle and Sheep

Abortion in cattle is defined as the expulsion of a foetus within 270 days of insemination, in sheep as lambs born before they are able to survive in the external environment. They are generally born dead or survive for less than 24 hours. An abortion early in gestation is usually termed an early embryonic loss, often the only signs are a late return to service. The passage of a dead foetus at, or just prior to the expected due date is classed as a stillbirth.

Below we discuss some causes of abortion in sheep and cattle. Abortions can be infectious (e.g viral or bacterial) or non-infectious (e.g. nutritional, genetic or high environmental temperatures). In this article we will summarise some of the infectious causes. When there are numerous abortions, above 2% of your flock/herd, an infectious cause is more likely. It is useful to determine the cause in the hope that preventative measures can be put in place.

We recommend discussing any abortion cases with your vet and as a diagnosis cannot be made on symptoms alone, a post mortem is usually advised. This can be carried out by one of our vet team on farm or they may suggest sampling at Carmathen APHA lab for more extensive testing. It is essential that these are performed as soon as possible after abortion and samples from the placenta are also obtained. Therefore, store the foetus in a cold area in a clean condition and keep any placenta found with it until options have been discussed with a vet. A clean old feed bag can serve well as a container.

In cattle, under UK law, all abortions should be reported to APHA. This is done through your vet. They will assess the likelihood of a bacteria called Brucella (See below) and authorise an abortion enquiry if required. Many herds will be advised to have an enquiry which

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is funded and includes a visit and sampling for Brucella. Whilst the vet is carrying out this sampling, other samples can be taken to test for other causes under a free visit!

Whilst awaiting a diagnosis it is sensible to isolate all aborting animals as soon as they are identified. Immediate removal of all aborted material is also advised. Do this in a hygienic manner, noting that some causes of abortion can cause serious harm to humans (pregnant or not!). Ensure no farm pets or wildlife can access this material.

The following list is not exhaustive but worthy of note:

Enzootic abortion: One of the most common causes of abortion in Sheep, it can also cause serious problems for pregnant women. A reminder that if pregnant you should avoid all sheep around lambing time. Also named Chlamydial abortion it is caused by a bacteria. There is a widely used vaccine available to help reduce this in your flock. Generally, ewes will produce dead or weak lambs in the last 3 weeks of gestation. Often problems will not occur immediately but in the next pregnancy. It is recommended the vaccine is given to all eligible animals before the next breeding season.

Toxoplasmosis: A cause of abortion in sheep, this is another concern for pregnant women and those with immune issues. Caused by a small parasite, cat/vermin faeces contaminating feed spreads this disease. A vaccine is available to reduce abortions in diagnosed flocks. Infection in early pregnancy results in early embryo loss with a high percentage of barren ewes and increased return to service after irregular time periods. Infection later in pregnancy causes production of weak lambs or abortion.

Campylobacteriosis: Another common cause of abortion in sheep. It is linked to high stocking rate and unhygienic conditions in late gestation. It can be brought into flocks by carrier sheep but also birds etc can cause contamination of feed and water troughs. Again, infection causes late abortion or less commonly production of weakly live lambs.

Schmallenberg Virus (SBV): Seen in sheep, cattle and goats, animals are born dead or alive at term or aborted following infection of the dam. This viral cause of abortion has been diagnosed in our area in recent weeks and is transmitted by midges. Reported diagnoses are linked to congenitally deformed lambs (and some calves!) with fixed joints and bent limbs. Sheep in particular can be affected with reduced conception rates, early embryonic deaths and abortions. Early lambing flocks are more likely to be affected as they would have been at the vulnerable stage of gestation at the peak of the midge season in autumn. It is suspected that the warm autumn and warmer early winter are likely to have extended the active midge period and may result in more cases over a longer period. APHA is currently offering free testing for SBV so discuss any suspicions you have with one of the vet team.

Neospora: Generally this is an issue with cattle but can affect sheep. Most abortion occurs at 5-7months but can also get stillbirth, premature or full-term calves. The dam can abort in future pregnancies. Causing approximately 10 % of UK abortions it can be managed by blood sampling cows 4-10 weeks prior to calving. It is advisable to not breed replacement heifers from positive animals and cull them when possible. Dogs and foxes are a likely source of disease so it is prudent to remove placenta, foetus and other aborted materials before dogs can get to them and also restrict dogs access to cattle feed and water.

BVD: a virus affecting cattle which can cause embryonic death and return to oestrus, foetal death/abortion, mummification of the foetus, birth defects of the nervous system and eyes, weak/premature calves and live persistently-infected calves. These PI animals go on to infect other animals so it is beneficial to identify and remove these asap after birth. Vaccination can help protect your herd.

Leptospirosis: a common infection in dairy and beef herds causing infertility, abortion and poor milk yield. Spread by contaminated urine or abortion products from stock, it can cause flu like symptoms in humans. Vaccination of your herd can reduce the incidence of disease and help protect members of staff with lower chances of contamination.

Salmonella: Linked to abortion and death of sheep and cattle. This is also another infectious cause of disease in humans. Generally, brought onto farms via infected feed/water or animals.

Bacillus Licheniformis & Listeria: although unrelated both are caused by feeding wet, spoiled feed, usually silage.

Blue Tongue Virus (BTV): A notifiable virus which has been reported to cause brain lesions in calves. There is no vaccine to this current version of BTV (8). If you or your vet has any suspicion of BTV then APHA must be notified immediately.

Brucellosis: Can affect most farm species and humans. It is a notifiable disease, meaning APHA must be notified if it is suspected. Infection is spread by contact with the discharge from genitalia or milk from infected individuals.

Q fever: This is a reportable bacterial disease that can cause problems in ruminants and spread to humans. It is shed in milk, urine, faeces and also birth fluids and placenta. It is very stable in the environment and can be spread in dirty/windy conditions. A vaccine is available.

This month's author is Morgan Hanks and as she mentions, contact the practice if you have concerns about fertility on your farm.



Office opening hours

Monday – Friday (Except Bank Holidays)

8.30am - 5.30pm

Emergency out of hours service

Weeknights 5.30pm - 8.30am

Saturday & Sunday all day