

South Wales Farm Vets

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Our Team



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Living And Working In Your Community

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Hello and welcome to June. I hope you are all continuing to keep safe and well.

We are now desperate for rain, fingers crossed we will get some soon – who would have thought it 3 months ago!

Coronavirus continues to affect all our lives. We are concerned with track and trace testing that we could take a hit at the practice and lose team members for 2 weeks. To avoid a complete shut down we have now split into two groups, and we will be more likely to be wearing PPE even when a 2 metre distance can be maintained for a whole visit – this is for your protection as well as ours. Not the best weather to be all toggged up! We are back up to full staff numbers again now with Rhian returning, long may it last.

Attention is now turning to bull/ram fertility and preparing breeding herds/flocks for the all-important next season. We are doing blood sampling to check for infectious causes of abortion in sheep – if you had any problems, get in touch. Now is the time to think about vasectomising potential teasers also. Some people may have struggled to obtain sheep abortion vaccines in previous years, bear in mind that these vaccines can be given to breeding ewes greater than 5 months of age and in the 4 months prior to mating. So consider ordering early and beating the rush if your mating season allows.

Stay safe and keep your distance.

Mary

Bad weather for cows

Whilst the recent weather has been great for silaging, it's been rubbish for cows. Not only is there a shortage of grass but they will also be suffering from heat stress. As a rough guide, a milking cow will produce 1.4kW of heat, and a dry cow or suckler cow around 1kW – equivalent to 1 bar on an electric fire – which is far from ideal on a hot day.

The upper critical temperature (UCT) for cows lies between 22°C and 25°C. The actual figure depends on the relative humidity (RH), which gives the temperature – humidity index (THI). It is worth remembering that on most summer days, RH is over 80% in the UK.

Above the UCT, cows need to adapt to stay cool, which comes with a number of consequences. First, cows need to cool themselves by increasing blood flow to the skin, drooling and panting. These processes require energy, meaning that the cow's food requirement increases by up to 20%. Stressed cows will tend to herd together, meaning that their natural heat generation makes cooling more difficult.

Second, cows will reduce the amount of heat they generate. This is mainly done by decreasing rumination, meaning that they will eat less, and avoid high fibre forages. This is a particular problem in dairy cows close to calving, which are typically fed a high fibre diet. They have the 'perfect storm' of higher energy requirements and lower feed intakes, which is a bad start to their next lactation.

Water intakes will also increase to replace ongoing losses, so for a dairy cow producing 30kg of milk, her water requirement will be in excess of 150 litres a day. This can put extra pressure on troughs close to the milking parlour, as most cows will not walk more than 250 metres for a drink if they know they will be passing water later in the day.



Sian Fuller



Rachel Davies



Laura Grey



Sian Lloyd



Helen Dando



Tracey Huntley

Dairy cows will typically produce less milk when under heat stress. Losses of up to 1/3 of the daily yield have been seen, which come with an increased risk of clinical mastitis once the environmental temperature goes above 28 °C – easily done in a full collecting yard.

The high temperature also has dramatic effects on reproduction in both beef and dairy cattle. The ovary is most severely affected, with even short periods of heat stress giving a measurable drop in reproductive efficiency. There is also a prolonged carry-over of heat effects, as follicles (eggs) in the early stage of development are also affected. This means that the current spell of hot weather is likely to impact cow fertility into August.



Follicles which are heat stressed are effectively of lower quality than normal follicles. This means that they produce less of their natural hormones during the cow's cycle. Reduced oestrogen leads to decreased oestrus (bulling) behaviour, and a reduced ovulation rate when cows are served. At the same time, the normal dominance of follicles is disturbed, so a much higher twinning rate is seen in cows served in hot weather. On farms that PD cattle under 8-10 weeks, the twins can usually be detected when the cow is scanned, and steps taken ahead of the next lactation.

The uterine environment for the developing foetus is also negatively affected as the ovary will produce less progesterone (the hormone that maintains pregnancy). This means that conception rates can drop as low as 10-20%, and even in cows that become pregnant, early pregnancy losses (between 30 and 90 days in calf) can triple, often reaching 8-10% of cows confirmed in calf. Problem breeder, i.e. cows on their 4th service or more, seem even more susceptible to heat stress than the 'normal' cows.

Where possible, the environment should be adapted to improve airflow to allow cooling, although this may not be possible where cows are out. Lastly in herds using AI it is possible to manipulate ovulation timing to recover some of the drop but this needs to be discussed on an individual farm basis.

Dairy Cow Lameness EIP Project – Get free help to discuss lameness in your herd by joining a project run by Sara Pedersen a consultant vet and Specialist in Cattle Health and Production.

The aim of the project is to assess two different methods of lameness knowledge transfer (alone and in combination) and assess which is the most effective in driving change on farm. The two methods are one-to-one advice from your own vet and participation in Farmer Action Groups. The project will last two years.

24 farmers in the South East of Wales are needed and If you wish to take part, you can select to be part of one of the four following groups (allocated on a first come, first served basis):

1. Control group: Mobility score at enrolment, 12 months and 24 months. You will not be made aware of the scores.
2. Healthy Feet Programme Lite: Mobility scores every 12 months and lameness support through the AHDB Healthy Feet Programme Lite (HFPLite) by your own vet. This involves an initial visit to undertake a risk assessment and form an action list, followed by twelve-month reviews.
3. Farmer Action Group: Mobility scores every 12 months. Knowledge sharing will be via facilitated Farmer Action Groups. These will be every 2 months for the two years with each member of the group expected to host two meetings. Each 2 hour meeting will involve a farm walk followed by a facilitated discussion.
4. Healthy Feet Programme Lite plus Farmer Action Group: Mobility scores will be undertaken as above. Those in this group will receive lameness support through the HFPLite and also through a Farmer Action Group.

All those taking part will also be required to answer a questionnaire at the start and the end of the project.

If you would like to express your interest or to find out more then please contact **Morgan** at SWFV or **Sara Pedersen** directly on **07545 431800** or **sara@farmdynamics.co.uk**.