

South Wales Farm Vets

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Our Team



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Living And Working In Your Community

June 2022

Hello and welcome to the June Newsletter – where did May go??!! We have certainly calmed down a bit in work – we're onto the last of the lambings and associated problems and we have been able to take a breath and catch up on paperwork – everyone's favourite.

A lot of you are now turning your attention to showing your stock with a return to normal shows. It has certainly been a pleasure to attend these events again and see some impressive entries from our clients. We will be at the new look Vale Show this August – we have been promised a pitch near to the agricultural area. Rhian will be taking the judge around for the best suckler herd competition – the Huw Davey Memorial Shield. Don't forget to enter!

It has also been good to see the Young Farmers getting back to normal again – with the recent pantomime competition, Field day and Rally day. Tom was judging the best halter competition at the Rally and Rhian represented the practice at the Bridgend Anniversary Dinner last month.

When writing the May newsletter, we were all in need of some rain. May delivered! The weather is slowly warming up – and so the parasites will thrive. Read on for some alternative suggestions from Tom.

Mary

Tom ponders.... our alternative farming future

I recently took the plunge and watched the Amazon prime series: Clarkson's Farm. In my opinion it was a fantastic series and well worth a watch. It painted a realistic picture of what farming life is like, something not normally seen on television, albeit with the odd Clarkson shenanigan. There was also a strong emphasis on financials, the changing climate and the environment.



This got me thinking about farming with mother nature, rather than fighting her. My question is could this be done without negatively impacting productivity? Below is some of the information I came across while trying to answer this.

Increasing Biodiversity

There are two schools of thought on increasing biodiversity in agricultural land.

1. Land sparing – where land is left unfarmed, albeit the land that is farmed is farmed more intensively
 2. Wildlife-friendly farming – where farming is tailored to enhance wildlife by being more integrated.
- Land sparing does not necessarily mean leaving entire fields to nature. It can be as simple as leaving 1m boundaries between hedge and crop, a 2-3m strip through the centre of a field or leaving unproductive land unfarmed.

Increasing biodiversity has been shown to improve productivity. In one study when 8% of land was set aside measured yield was seen to increase in crops of wheat, beans and oil seed rape. Ultimately this meant the yield was comparable to control fields (no wildlife habitat).

Another study looked at improving biodiversity in grassland by sowing a species rich seed mixtures. This showed increasing plant species diversity was more effective in increasing productivity than higher



Sian Fuller



Dom Day



Jimmy Jackson



Sian Lloyd



Helen Dando



Tracey Huntley

management intensity.

With rising costs in fertiliser and fuel, increasing biodiversity seems to have good potential to positively affect yields. A range of plant species within grassland can also be more resistant to changes in climate eg some species will be better during droughts. Some species (herbage) are also better at up taking trace elements (eg cobalt) from the soil, beneficial for livestock growth.

Dung Beetles and Parasitic Wasps

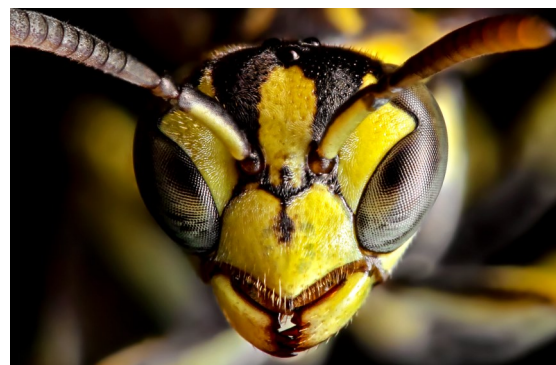
Dung beetles are vitally important insects who can help livestock farming in a number of ways:

1. They take nutrients from dung directly to soil roots
2. They reduce parasitic burdens on grass by burying worm eggs
3. They naturally aerate the soil when burrowing



Unfortunately their numbers are in decline (see www.dungbeetlesforfarmers.co.uk/ for a full list of reasons). One way we can help is by reducing ivermectin usage and adopting best practices in worm control this can easily be done without decrementing animal welfare.

With fly season upon us good fly control is paramount for animal welfare. Flies can carry disease such as Summer mastitis and will cause a drop in productivity. Historically our fly control has been reliant on medication. Native parasitic wasps can aid this as they destroy nuisance fly pupae. A couple of vet practices have started offering bags of parasitic wasp pupae which can be spread around farm yards. Please let me know if this is something you might be interested in.



Improving Efficiency

Ultimately livestock production produces CO2 and rightly or wrongly pressures are being placed upon us to reduce the amount of CO2 produced. In my opinion good land management is a very important part in locking away carbon, which grazing livestock are an integral part of.

To reduce the amount of CO2 per kg of animal produced, improve the kg of animal produced off land available and reduce the impact that animal has while it is on the land available to it we need to ensure it is as efficient as possible. By breeding animals that are more efficient and ensuring they are healthy throughout their lives, they will be able to perform with less inputs and meet slaughter weight quicker. Ultimately the less time an animal is alive the less CO2 it is accountable for, something those who have done carbon audits will be aware of.

Reducing Waste

Reducing single use items without decrementing animal welfare is something we struggle with in the veterinary industry. Consider the simple one use sterile syringe for example. It comes in its own individual plastic packaging, is designed not to be reused... and disposed of in to landfill or incinerated. During a cow c-section I am going to use at least 5 separate syringes. There is movement within the veterinary industry to look at alternative materials for our consumables and improve their recyclability.

In Conclusion

From my reading there is definite scope for working with mother nature without impacting productivity. There is going to be change within the agricultural industry and I hope it is led by those at the coal face who work within and with the environment every day of the year.

Office opening hours

Monday – Friday

8.30am - 5.30pm

Emergency out of hours service

Weeknights 5.30pm - 8.30am

Saturday & Sunday all day