

South Wales Farm Vets

Ty Newydd

Groes Faen

CF72 8NE

Tel; 01443 223751



## Our Team



Mary Walters



Rhian Matthews



Clive Moynan



Morgan Richards



Tom Searle

## Living And Working In Your Community

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Hello and welcome to the May Newsletter, once again, where has the time gone? It's very difficult to keep track of time, many of the events that punctuate our weeks are missing – getting the children off to school, market, sports practices and various meetings. I hope you are all coping well with the new normal. Many of our clients have recently embraced online banking to avoid the need to visit the bank. Did you know that you can make payments and enter cheques online and it's not only easy but considerably cheaper too.

At the practice there have been a few changes. Rhian is working from home, not doing visits at all but doing a lot of the background stuff that takes twice as long as you think it should. To cover Rhian's clinical calls, we are delighted to welcome the return of Laura Grey. Laura has completed a gruelling 18 month internship in an equine hospital and is enjoying a little light relief back with us! We don't know how long this situation is likely to continue, but we are very pleased to have Laura back.

Our work has continued almost as normal, we are very busy with the end of lambing, and into the calvings. You have been very good about social distancing, taking it seriously and helping us greatly. We have been allowed to continue with TB testing where social distancing can be maintained, and with much of the routine work needed for the continuity of the food supply chain. It is so disappointing (but not a great shock) that farmers are not being supported – it seems outrageous that dairy production has had to be cut, beef and lamb prices gone down (and don't even mention the Polish beef). Happier times ahead!

Our services continue as normal though and later in the newsletter a few seasonal issues are considered – preventative actions. Now is the time to take stock of lambing and work out how to improve things next year.

Stay safe, hope to see you from a 2 metre distance soon.

Mary

### Managing the stock bull

The average working life of a UK stock bull is 4 years, although a quarter of bulls manage only two years or less, with poor mobility the most common reason for culling.

Increasing the number of calves a bull sires, by increasing the number of cows he runs with, and the length of his working life, will reduce his 'cost' per calf, meaning that a more expensive bull, with better genetics becomes an option.

A fully fertile bull will get over 90% of 50 disease free, cycling cows in calf within 9 weeks, with 65% of these cows calving in the first three weeks – so calving will almost be over before you know it. Fertility tests in the UK usually show 20-30% of bulls to be sub-fertile, meaning less cows in calf and an extended calving period.

Obviously, as vets, we can check that the bull is fully fertile before he works, and that high-risk cows (e.g. retained cleansing or difficult calving) are clean and cycling, but correct management of the bull, both whilst growing and whilst on farm will improve his working potential and lifespan.





Sian Fuller



Russell Fuller



Rachel Davies



Sian Lloyd



Helen Dando



Tracey Huntley

Choosing a new bull needs a be a balance between EBVs (figures) and stockmanship. EBVs are used by at least half of farmers when buying a new bull, e.g. a positive calving ease figure will mean less assisted calvings, and are a great way of screening the catalogue before a sale to draw up a shortlist.

At the sale, stockmanship becomes important. Whilst it is tempting to go for the most impressive bull, over-feeding has several negative effects on the bull, so it is best to think 'fit not fat' or for some condition score of 3.5:

- High concentrate rations can create rumen acidosis, which can lead to liver abscesses in later life
- Fast growth rates lay down low density, poor quality muscle – this reduces the bull’s ability to work and predisposes him to muscular injuries
- Early onset degenerative joint disease is more common in heavier, faster grown bulls
- High levels of fat around the scrotal neck will overheat the testicles, causing poor quality sperm production

Even with stock bulls already on farm, it is important to note that sperm production takes a full 10 weeks to complete, so preparation of the bull needs to start well before he is used. Large changes to management in this period can compromise sperm quality and therefore the bull’s ability to work. An example of this is making sure that all necessary vaccination programmes are completed at least a month before he is due to work.

### Seasonal Reminders

#### Nematodirus



Nematodirois is a particularly nasty disease in lambs caused by a worm with an unusual life cycle which helps us to predict the risk period. Lambs grazing pasture that carried lambs last spring are at risk with those lambs 6-12 weeks old typically affected. Disease exhibits as diarrhoea, stunted growth and often death. Under certain climatic conditions it can strike very quickly, with little or no warning.

Forecasts based on the recent weather conditions indicate that the risk for nematodirus infection is now very high in our area and we have seen cases at the practice. The treatment of choice is a benzimidazole (white) wormer administered without delay.

#### Barren Ewes

Ewes found empty at the end of lambing are both frustrating and a significant financial drain having been fed all winter. If you have a significant number of these ewes, have you considered getting them checked? We can blood sample 6-8 barren or aborted ewes to check for the infectious causes of lamb losses, toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion. There is some subsidisation of the laboratory fees available for the testing so contact the practice to discuss booking with us if you are interested.

#### Fly Strike

This is a problem linked to contaminated/wet wool or wounds. These damp areas attract several species of flies which then lay eggs on the animal. The eggs can hatch larvae within 12 hours in optimal conditions and are maggots within 3 days, these feed off the local skin and faeces.

If you notice maggots on any part of a sheep clip away the local wool and clean the area. Ensure all maggots are removed. Shear the whole body if appropriate. If there is damage to the skin an antibiotic and anti-inflammatory such as Metacam would be advised. Applying a fly repellent such as Crovect will kill maggots and prevent further damage.

To prevent, ensure sheep are shorn as temperatures increase. A heavy fleece can cause sheep to overheat and the lower layers of wool can become moist, especially wool around the back end of the sheep. This area is most likely to become contaminated with faeces and urine, more so if the animal has diarrhoea/scours. Avoiding internal parasites especially round worms can help avoid loose faeces that are likely to contaminate the rear end, while keeping the wool short (dagging) also helps. Routinely apply a fly repellent before risk periods (usually a pour on or dip). The NADIS blowfly alert on their website can help to identify the periods of highest risk. <https://alerts.nadis.org.uk/>

#### Signs:

- Isolation
- Nibbling affected area
- Discolouration/loss of wool
- Tissue decay
- Toxaemia
- Death