

# CLEVEDALE OCTOBER 2012 FARM NEWSLETTER

## Winter Calf Feeding

As we approach the winter again all too soon, we'd like you to consider your approach to dairy calf management. Winter housing is the period when we see most calf disease, particularly with respect to scour and pneumonia. Calves that are under-fed and energy deficient will be at a high risk of developing these common calf-hood diseases. This is because at low or negative growth rates their immune systems do not mature rapidly enough to provide protection from infectious disease.

Young calves need energy for both maintenance and growth. Energy requirements for maintenance increase significantly in a cold environment. The Lower Critical Temperature (LTC) is the temperature at which an animal begins to use extra energy to maintain normal body temperature. Calves under 3 weeks old have an LCT of 20°C and they require 40% more energy for maintenance when temperatures drop to 0°C.

A growth rate of 0.4kg per day is the minimum threshold for adequate immune system development during the first 4 weeks of life.

Milk replacer requirements for a 40kg calf at varying temperatures

<i>Temperature (°C)</i>	<i>Milk for maintenance</i>	<i>Milk for 0.4kg gain</i>	<i>Total milk required</i>
16	3 litres	2 litres	5 litres
4	4 litres	2 litres	6 litres
-6	5 litres	2 litres	7 litres

The volume of milk required for maintenance increases significantly as temperatures decline. A calf fed 2 litres twice daily at 16°C will gain weight, but below 4°C it will start losing weight. Therefore more milk must be given during cold weather, particularly to younger calves which are only consuming small amounts of solid feed. Make sure you use a good quality milk replacer with a good fat content (20%) which is the principal source of energy.

You also need to encourage maximum creep intakes by supplying it ad-lib from a few days old, ensuring it is clean and dry and, critically, ensuring calves have access to clean water all the time – this factor is often neglected but research has shown that solid feed consumption is reduced by 40% when milk is the only liquid provided. How many Cream Crackers would you eat without a drink?!

Remember that calves that become chilled are more susceptible to disease. Well fed calves can tolerate low temperatures provided they can escape from draughts and have a clean, dry straw bed that they can 'nest' down into. Good ventilation does not have to mean draughts at calf level. Body heat will be lost rapidly when lying on a damp, poorly drained bed a bale of straw is still cheaper than a dead calf.

## **Wet Weather Worms**

Although not strictly a worm, fluke is destined to be an issue this year as the wet conditions experienced this summer are ideal for fluke development. The classical sign is “bottle jaw” but this is far from the whole story and will more commonly cause decreased production before anything else is noticed; lambs may take longer to finish, fertility may be affected in sheep and cattle, fatalities may be experienced, liver damage may result in condemnations at the abattoir or milk production may be reduced with an increase in the likes of slow fever and displaced abomasums. As well as clinical signs, it is possible to investigate whether fluke may be an issue for you by checking faecal samples for eggs (only if adults are present), analysing blood samples for the presence of liver damage or testing blood or milk for the presence of antibodies. Remember, not all flukicides kill all stages of fluke so consideration needs to be given to the best product for your circumstances. Please speak to one of us to discuss any concerns.

The other worm seen more frequently in wet conditions is Lungworm. We have already seen several outbreaks and would urge you to consider this if you find stock coughing whilst still at grass. The presence of lungworm is also considered to be one of the risk factors for pneumonia outbreaks at housing so make sure young-stock especially are wormed, ideally a couple of weeks before housing with a persistent group-3 wormer.

## **Flock replacements**

Sheep Scab, resistant worms, footrot, CODD – some of the more common diseases you might buy in when you’re buying replacements this autumn. Ideally replacements will be footbathed immediately on arrival and examined for any lameness issues; they should be treated for resistant worms, scab and possibly fluke using varying strategies involving injectable group-3 wormers, “Zolvix” and fluke/levamisole combinations; after worming they need to be yarded for 48 hours before going onto old grazing and then kept separate from the rest of the flock for 2-3 weeks to identify any developing problems.

## **Cobalt Feed supplements**

Cobalt is an important mineral, in sheep particularly. It is converted in the rumen to vitamin B12 and is one of a number of trace elements central to health and productivity. There is a proposal by the European Food Safety Authority to halve the maximum amount of cobalt that can be fed in diets (but not by bolus or injection). There are some clients who already recognise issues with cobalt and use supplements to good effect. Now would be a good time to consider assessing your flock’s mineral status using blood samples to see if cobalt, or indeed some of the other important elements, may be holding back flock performance which might be further affected by future legislation.