

Clevedale Veterinary Practice: Winter Sheep Newsletter 2009

Barren Ewe Check

Scanning time has come round again! Scanning figures allow us our first glimpse of how successful the following lambing season will be, as they let us know how many lambs we can expect at lambing time if all else goes well. The first 'hurdle' to climb is the number of barren ewes. The aim for barren ewes is <2%, 2% can be considered fairly normal but >2% suggests a health or nutrition problem.

Toxoplasma gondii is a common cause for high numbers of barren ewes. As in previous years Intervet/Schering-Plough are offering their complimentary Barren Ewe Check from 1st December 2009 until 31st March 2010. This offers subsidised blood samples from 6-8 barren ewes to be tested for Toxoplasma gondii.

The aim for scanning percentages is as follows:

- Lowland: 190%
- Upland: 160%
- Hill: 110%

Poor scanning results can be due to:

- Toxoplasma gondii (as above)
- Poor ewe condition
- Inadequate ram power and fertility
- Poor nutrition
- Haemonchus worms
- Liver fluke
- Lameness

Therefore, we highly recommend that we investigate further high barren or low scanning percentages in order to prevent further losses in subsequent years.

Ovine Abortion-an Update

Around lambing time there is nothing more disheartening than abortions. Less than 2% of (non-barren) ewes/ewe lambs should abort; however, you should also not experience 2 or

more abortions daily for 2 to 3 consecutive days. If either of these occur then veterinary intervention is required.

Each 1% abortion rate reduces the flock gross margin by 2% meaning that an average 2% abortion rate results in a 4% loss of gross margin. If the abortion rate is above average at 5% this will result in a 10% loss of gross margin, which could be as much as £5.00 per ewe.

High levels of abortion can be caused by:

- Enzootic abortion (Chlamydomphila abortus)
- Toxoplasma abortion (T. gondii)
- Campylobacter abortion
- Listeriosis abortion
- Border disease
- Salmonella

Investigation should include a vet visit, with collection of detailed information about the group aborting. The placenta and aborted foetuses should be sent to VLA Thirsk (if not possible then samples can be taken by a vet and sent to VLA Thirsk). Ewes can be blood sampled for Toxoplasma and Enzootic abortion (subsidised by Intervet/Schering-Plough).

Remember – aborting ewes should be isolated until the cause of abortion is determined. Hygiene is very important – all abortion material and bedding should be disposed of and pens should be disinfected thoroughly between ewes. All aborting ewes should be marked so that blood samples can be taken at a later date if abortion levels rise over the 2% threshold. Don't foster ewe lambs onto ewes that have aborted, as this will spread Enzootic abortion to that lamb.

Flock Performance Indicator-know your figures!

Intervet/Schering-Plough have developed a user-friendly Flock Performance Indicator. This booklet allows you to record all your production figures on one sheet to allow easy analysis of these figures. Benchmark figures are provided to allow identification of areas that require improvement. Areas covered are Scanning Information, Abortion Information, Lamb losses, Lamb sales information (optional) and Replacement Information (optional). If these booklets are kept yearly then it allows improvements to be analysed year on year and production to be maximised. These can be used on their own or alongside an existing Flock Health Plan. If you are interested in finding out more about these extremely useful booklets then please contact Wendy or Babs.

Ewe Nutrition and Trace Elements

It is advisable to regularly body condition score (BCS) ewes throughout the year. However, this is particularly important during the last 2 months of pregnancy (especially older ewes and ewe lambs) when you should aim to achieve and maintain a BCS of 3 units for the last 6 weeks before lambing. The ewes should not lose more than 0.5 units in the last 6 weeks. If they start to lose condition then their energy intake must be increased to prevent nutritional diseases and problems at lambing time.

Ewes can also be blood sampled 4 weeks before the start of lambing to measure their energy levels. If the amount of energy that they are receiving from their diet is inadequate then it can be increased during the last 4 weeks of gestation to avoid twin-lamb disease and other nutritional diseases.

Copper: If copper deficiency and swayback has been a problem on your farm in the past then you'll be well aware that your ewes need blood sampled for their copper levels about 12 weeks before lambing. If a deficiency is detected then the ewes can be supplemented in time to prevent problems at lambing.

Vitamin E/Selenium: deficiency results in white muscle disease in lambs.

Cobalt deficiency: results in ill thrift and poor lamb production.

If the VitaminE/Selenium and Cobalt status of your flock is unknown but a problem is suspected then ewes and/or lambs can be blood sampled at the end of the summer when they are on grass alone.

Winter Meetings

Following on from our successful cattle and sheep seminars held in 2009, we will be holding a Lambing Time Workshop in February. This will cover lambing techniques and dealing with difficult lambings, and will advise on how to minimise lamb deaths from birth to docking (including lamb care and feeding, treating the hypothermic lamb, Watery mouth, etc.)

If you are interested in attending this workshop then please contact the office to have your name added to the list.

Further meetings for the New Year will be announced later – if there are topics you would like to see covered, please feel free to let us know.

