



Smallholders' News

Castle Veterinary
Group



Smallholders'
Club

Vets' Welcome

This welcome starts with a warning- if you are squeamish beware, there are some post mortem chicken images on the next page! A little gory for Halloween! Here at the vets we are holding our breath as late autumn calving and winter housing approaches. At this time of year TB testing and calf pneumonia tend to peak! Before we get that far rams need to go in for breeding – if you want lambs next spring please pay special attention to the top techniques column for some tips - Amy, Katherine, Kelly and Becca!!

A Wasting Disease...

Every year we diagnose quite a high proportion of cattle with Johnes disease, this year we have seen a few more pet goats and sheep affected too so we thought we'd try to update you about this condition.

Johnes (pronounced yoh-knees) is caused by bacteria called *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies *paratuberculosis* (MAP) which can affect cattle, sheep and goats. This is a different bacteria to the one causing TB.

Newborn animals are infected with Johnes via water or feed contaminated by an infected animal's faeces. We tend to think of contaminated muck on an udder or teat being enough to infect calves, lambs and goat kids though some evidence for infection in the womb exists.

These young animals often show no signs until they reach at least three years of age, and usually later than that. Unfortunately as they get older they shed more Johnes in their dung, this starts before they themselves start to look ill.

The onset of signs is often associated with a stressful event such as parturition (giving birth). Affected ruminants loose weight quite rapidly despite a normal appetite. Cattle have profuse scour – watery, 'bubbly' diarrhoea is very characteristic. Once signs set in and a diagnosis is made animals are unlikely to regain condition so should be sent to slaughter sooner rather than later. Goats and sheep tend not to have any diarrhoea, just weight loss.

As vets we always insist on a blood sample to confirm the diagnosis, this sampling can be carried out on a herd basis to try and identify carriers which may be shedding before showing signs. There is no cure for Johnes, affected animals have to be sent to slaughter on welfare grounds. Given this outcome Johnes is an important condition to identify and eliminate.

Legal Aspects of Keeping Livestock

Animal Welfare

There is legalisation in place to protect the welfare of livestock. The owner of an animal has a duty of care to ensure adequate welfare standards are met.



The five freedoms outline the basic provisions stock keepers must supply their animals ;

Freedom from hunger and thirst

Freedom from discomfort

Freedom from pain, injury or disease

Freedom to express normal behaviour

Freedom from fear and distress

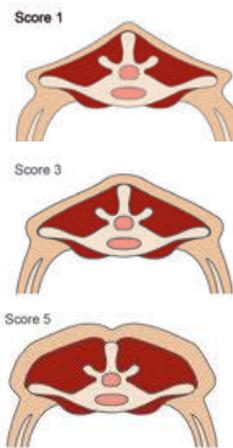
The current laws regarding welfare are the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2007.

Top Techniques Column

Body Condition Score.

Body condition scoring is a useful way to assess and manage the fitness of your flock. It can be handy at this time of year to check whether lambs are fit for slaughter or if ewes are ready for breeding.

To score a sheep it is essential to use your hands rather than doing it by eye. Sheep are scored from 1 – the thinnest to 5 – the fattest. The cross-sections show the bone of the spinal canal with different coverings of muscle and fat. It is important to assess the spine just in front of the hips (the first picture) and over the tail base.



At tupping (breeding) time you should aim for a body condition score of 3.5 – this should be the fattest time of year for your ewes . Nutrition is particularly important in determining the number of embryos and therefore the number of lambs your ewes will have – they shouldn't be too fat or they will have too many lambs which they may struggle to produce and raise.

The Eblex link in the email will take you to a great guide for scoring. Eblex is an excellent source of information and we would encourage you to sign up to their 'Better Returns' scheme.

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Did you know?? A cow grazes for up to 8 hours a day, taking in about 45 kg (100lb) of feed and the equivalent of a bath tub full of water. This is worth bearing in mind especially if the weathermen are right about snowfall before Christmas, make sure your animals' water supplies do not freeze up!

Eggy Situations

Egg Peritonitis

In a chicken's reproductive tract the oviducts carry the yolk from the ovary to the vent, during this time the shell is formed around the yolk. If a chicken has any



damage to the oviducts or if the egg does not form properly then egg yolks are continuously 'laid' into the abdomen. These egg yolks accumulate quicker than the chicken can reabsorb them and cause discomfort and difficulty breathing. The chicken may start to stand upright and with a wide base like a penguin to try to reduce the pressure. This situation is made much worse because the egg yolk provides the perfect environment for bacterial growth. The resulting infection is known as Egg Peritonitis. The bacteria from the infection multiply and end up in the blood stream – this is fatal for the chicken. In the very early stages there are some treatment options but unfortunately in some cases the most humane option is to put the bird to sleep.

Egg Bound Chickens

Chickens can become egg bound if an egg is too big to pass through the pelvis and as a result 'gets stuck' in the oviduct. This can be due to a calcium imbalance in the diet or induced by stress. You may notice the chicken repeatedly visiting the nest box and straining without an egg being passed. If you suspect that your chicken maybe egg bound then we recommend bringing it in so we can confirm the problem, treat the existing situation and discuss diet, calcium supplementation and chicken stressors to prevent further trouble.

We are keen to hear what you would like to see in the next issue...

As usual you can find out the answer to our 'Quick Picture Quiz' and read some interesting 'Case Reviews' but if there are any topics you have wondered about please reply to this email!

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Quick Picture Quiz??



We sent out an email about sheep feet infections this time last year. Here is a different condition...If your sheep's foot looked like this what would your diagnosis be? Find out more next issue!

Last issue's quick picture quiz answer was 'Sheep scab'

Sheep scab is caused by a mite, *Psoroptes ovis*. It has a strong economic implication on UK sheep farmers. Sheep scab can be transmitted by contact with infested sheep, or contact with scab material left on fences or in the environment. It is typically seen from October until March.

Sheep are initially seen rubbing on fences and kicking their flanks which leads to loss of their wool. On closer inspection they often have yellow-tinged skin lesions.

Sheep scab can only be diagnosed by performing microscopy on a skin scrape taken. If the mite has been detected appropriate treatment will be dispensed.

