



February 2024

Planning for the year ahead: Sheep small holders!

This February Vets Natalie and Lucy will be holding a sheep small holder meeting at the practice. They will be discussing important dates for the upcoming year, helpfully collated in a take home calendar. Issues such as when to worm and vaccinate your flock will be discussed, alongside how to keep on top of common illnesses (foot-rot).

In addition, as Castle Vets is now looking after a growing number of small holders, we're keen to discuss meetings and events in the future that you think would be helpful to you. Whether you are planning to lamb this year or simply have a few pet sheep, all small holders are welcome to attend. Food is, of course, provided!

Date: Monday 26th February 2024

Time: 18:30

Cost: £25 / attendee

Address: Castle Veterinary Group, Pennigillam Way, PL15 7ED

Please ring the practice on 01566 772371 to RSVP

Lambing For Kids!

Back by popular demand, this year we will also be running a lambing course for children 5-12 years old February Half Term 2024

Thursday 15th February 3pm – 5.30pm

Hosted by Castle Veterinary Group at Lower Goodmansleigh Farm, Launceston PL15 9QS (next to Homeleigh Garden centre)
By kind permission of Derek Broad + Rob Dymond

£10 ex VAT per child, accompanying adults go free!

- Use a lambing simulator to practice delivering lambs
- How to care for newborn lambs
- Spotting common problems
- Advanced lamb care - tagging, castrating and tail docking



Upcoming Cattle meeting – How to reduce Pneumonia in your youngstock + stores

Vets Andy and Roger will be joined by Andrew Tyler, a vet from Zoetis, to discuss the impact of pneumonia and management strategies. Both beef and dairy enterprises suffer from pneumonia at this time of year, and every farm has its own coping mechanisms. Open and guided conversation with other farmers could really help reduce your on-farm incidence!

Learn about common pitfalls, as well as easy (and often cheap!) tricks and tips for success, whether you're rearing calves or fattening stores.



When February 28th 10am-2pm, lunch included.

Where Duchy College, Stoke Climsland PL17 8PB.

This meeting is free of charge to Beef club members, or £25 per farm to non-members - bring as many of your team as you would like!

New Branch for Castle Vets fully open in Liskeard!

Our medicines collection box and farm office in Liskeard has moved to our new Liskeard small animal branch at:

- Unit 6B, Heathlands Road, Liskeard
- Next to 'In Bloom' flower shop
- In front of Ugalde & Sons Funeral Directors

We are now fully open and offer extended reception hours at the branch of 0845-1800 (excluding 1330-1430 daily). This increases the flexibility of when fridge meds can be picked up, as well as giving more time during which you will be able to speak face-to-face with a receptionist. Our medication collection box available 24hours and the access code has not changed – please give us a ring if you need a reminder of it!



**CASTLE
VETERINARY
GROUP**

As previously, we ask that all fridge medications still be ordered at least a day in advance - these will still be driven to the Liskeard branch as needed. Thank you for your continued support of our independent veterinary practice!

Investigating abortions – an investment in your herd or flock’s future

What is an abortion?

Cattle – any foetus / calf delivered less than 9 months after service date (whether alive or dead!)

Sheep – any foetus / lamb delivered less than 5 months after service date (whether alive or dead!)

Not all abortions are obvious! Any ‘early’ births are technically abortions, so if you have a run of these you should start to be suspicious.

If you don’t have an exact lambing or calving date, signs of a premature lamb or calf to look out for:

- Lack of hair on the coat, or a very ‘soft’ coat
- Malformed or absent front teeth
 - o check the lower jaw – the upper jaw never grows teeth and is always a tough ‘pad’
- Smaller offspring than expected
- Soft or very smooth ‘toes’



The dam not coming into milk is also a sign that she may not be far enough along in her pregnancy for the hormonal signals to have started the lactation process in her udder.

What is an ‘expected’ level of abortion?

Any more than 5% of you cows or sheep having early births should ring alarm bells! It’s easy to not notice issues when they are spaced out – that’s why keeping a note of suspicious births as you go is key. The numbers can be looked at after the bulk of lambing / calving is over, and checked to ensure levels didn’t creep up above normal! However, a string of abortions close together should always be investigated, even if it represents a smaller proportion of your herd/flock overall.

Immediate actions to take:

1. Make a note of the date and ID of the cow/sheep on your phone, a herd book, flock diary or whiteboard

- you don’t know what might happen in a few days, and begin able to identify any dams affected can be *incredibly* helpful, incase investigations become necessary later

2. Isolate the cow or sheep

- Take the mother away from other pregnant animals immediately, many causes of abortion spread through the uterine and vaginal discharges of aborted animals

3. Don’t chuck the placenta (bed) in a heap or in the woods!

- Bag it up + dispose of it properly via Peakes or Stattons, alongside the aborted foetus (lamb/calf)
- Farm dogs or foxes eating the ‘bed’ are part of the lifecycle of several abortive diseases

4. If you want to investigate the possible cause of abortions

- a. Clean the placenta with water ASAP (reduces contamination) + place in a clean bin bag
- b. Aborted lambs and calves should also be brought in for sampling, or can be sampled on farm by a vet
- c. Bloods from the cow/sheep can be useful too, so your vet might request this too



What testing can cost:



Bringing samples to the surgery is the most cost-effective way of investigating abortions; no call out fee, and minimal vet time! All abortion samples are sent away for testing at veterinary laboratories

Sheep: lab fees start at £20 (to check for Enzootic abortion – the most common cause!) ranging up to £90 for a thorough investigation

Cattle: lab fees start from £50 (to perform a general culture, or look for a specific disease) ranging up to £130 for a thorough investigation

Rarer causes or abortion can of course be further tested for after this point, should everything else come back negative.

What testing can reveal:

Nothing!

- Not all abortions are caused by infection, so a negative answer is generally what we want! Stress, nutrition, normal genetic defects are all possible non-infectious causes of abortion
- The level of investigation you and your vet have chosen to do, may not have included testing for all the infectious possibilities. This decision can be made due to financial restraints, use of vaccines on farm, or the specific presentation of a case
- Sometimes the quality of the material isn't good enough for the lab to give an answer, or multiple foetuses/placentas might be needed for testing, before an answer becomes clear
 - o This is less common, but always worth bearing in mind! Rotten placentas or foetuses are less likely to give a clear answer as to what went wrong



Infectious causes

Bacterial	Sheep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enzootic abortion (<i>Chlamydia abortus</i>, the most common cause of abortion in the UK flock) • Campylobacter • Salmonella
	Cattle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campylobacter • Salmonella • Leptospirosis • Q fever (<i>Coxiella burnetii</i>) • Brucellosis (the APHA will pay for a vet to come and take samples for this in non-milking cattle – all bulk tanks in the UK are checked for quarterly for Brucella abortus)
Viral	Sheep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borders Disease • Schmallenberg
	Cattle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BVD • IBR • Schmallenberg

Other	Sheep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toxoplasma gondi (the lifecycle of which involved cats and rodents) • Fungal placetitis (can occur due to feeding of moldy silage)
	Cattle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neospora (cattle parasite, the lifecycle of which involves dogs or/and foxes eating placenta) • Fungal placetitis (can occur due to feeding of moldy silage)

What can I do to minimize my chances of stock aborting?

- Worm farm dogs
- Don't allow farm cats access to sheep feed (covered bins rather than sacks)
- Follow the 'immediate actions' outlined above if any stock do abort ('biocontainment')
- Consider vaccination if your farm is high risk (if you buy in stock, especially from multiple sources/market) or a disease is proven to be present
 - o Abortion-causing diseases with UK licensed vaccines:
 - Sheep- Enzoitic ('Cevac'), Toxoplasma ('Toxovax')
 - Cattle – Leptospirosis, Salmonella, BVD, IBR, Q-fever
 - o Other vaccines can be available off-license if required (often produced in other countries or designed for other species)
- Retain own replacements + try to keep a closed herd or flock if possible!
- Be aware of yourself + other staff as carriers – both from animal to animal + from other farms onto your own
 - o Washing hands and/or wearing gloves goes a long way
 - o Cleaning overalls regularly
 - o Be aware of any disinfecting and kit you use on multiple sheep or cattle, such as calving jacks and lambing ropes

Schmallenberg Update -

We have seen several cases of Schmallenberg fetopathies (deformed dead lambs) over the past month. Schmallenburg Virus can infect sheep or cattle and is carried by midges. It tends to affect the UK in waves, with the South and Southwest being affected by the prevailing wind from the EU bringing midges across, and warmer climactic conditions. Natural immunity does build up, but if we have several years in a row with no exposure, cows and ewes may become susceptible again.

The most vulnerable stages of pregnancy for fetal deformities are days 62-180 in cattle and days 25-50 in sheep (older fetuses can clear the virus themselves).

The virus attacks developing lambs' nervous systems; these are most are delivered dead or aborted, but can they also present as 'dummy' lambs that die soon after birth.

Signs in lambs include:

- bent 'fused' hind or forelimbs
- domed skulls
- lambs having seizures shortly after birth
- lambs born blind or 'slow'



The APHA will test suspect lambs free-of-charge to enable surveillance,

so if you do have a suspected case please give us a call, and we will send off the lambs' brain. As we have had several confirmed cases, we urge all farmers to not use excessive force when lambing sheep - **malformations may make vaginal delivery impossible.**

As this is a disease caused by viral infection, antibiotics have no effect against it, and unfortunately vaccination is the only flock-level protection possible. An in depth discussion about the benefits of vaccination can be found here, and why it is not commonly used:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7349947/>

Presently, there is no vaccine in production in the UK. However, by reporting cases, we can continue to monitor the situation and add evidence to support the need for a vaccine in future breeding seasons.

