



St David's Farm Newsletter

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Bluetongue update

We have contacted all our clients with regard to ordering Bluetongue vaccine – please contact your vet if you have not heard anything about ordering vaccine.

As you will have seen in the press in recent weeks the main farming organisations are recommending vaccination. The aim is to achieve vaccination of 80% of susceptible animals. This will restrict the spread of virus and significantly reduce the reservoir of infection for next year. Experience on the continent was that the second year of infection was much more severe than the first year. This was due to the establishment of a reservoir that allowed a much greater spread. If we can reduce this reservoir with vaccination we can prevent greater problems next year.

If you have a neighbour whom you think may not be able to vaccinate – small holders with a few animals – please discuss this with them or put them in touch with a vet.

The DEFRA website has a good page on the vaccination plan:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/bluetongue/control/vaccination-rolloutplan.htm>

Devon and Cornwall are currently in the third highest priority area for vaccination. The vaccination will start on the East Coast and will move west, on a county basis, as vaccine becomes available. Currently it is illegal to vaccinate if you are not in a Protection Zone. Obviously the Protection Zone can change at any time but, to enable vaccine roll out, the Protection Zone may be extended.

Vaccine will only be issued to farms in counties where vaccination is allowed.

Thus we will be applying for vaccination using your holding numbers. We will be ordering exact doses for each farm – please be exact with your orders as we will not want to waste vaccine. As a practice we are not allowed to “stockpile” vaccine so we will be ordering exact numbers. We will be ordering two doses for each bovine and one for each sheep.

The cost of the vaccine – called Bovilis BTv8 - will be 55p/dose. As the dose is 1ml it will require a 1ml gun – we will supply these but there will be a charge. It is recommended that you use a gun that will sterilise the needle between animals – obviously vaccination could be a good way of spreading Bluetongue.

There will be a need to provide evidence of vaccination if animals are to be exported out of the Protection Zone or abroad. For domestic movement out of the Protection Zone there will be a requirement to have a declaration from your vet. This will be based on evidence of vaccination – medicine book, vaccine bottles etc. Thus there will be a need to return bottles to the practice if you are considering moving animals. For export there will have to be supervised vaccination by your vet.

There have been discussions about the use of insecticides to prevent the midges feeding on cattle and sheep. These products will not prevent midges feeding but they could kill them and prevent further spread. Please discuss with your vet. Please call with any queries.

Tony O'Loughlin – 07970492250



St David's noticeboard

Sheep farmers: The VLA have issued a Nematodirus warning as the cold snap followed by warm, wet weather is ideal conditions for this parasite which kills lambs before any clinical signs are seen. If you have lambs 6-12 weeks old contact us about worming as soon as possible. We are offering Endospec 2.5% drench at £17.26 for 2.5litres or £29.86 for 5 litres.

Bull testing: A reminder that the we now offer a full bull fertility testing service. Please contact the practice for more details or email jeremy@stdavids-vets.co.uk.

Devon County Show: We have a stall at the show on May 15-17th with information boards, prize quiz and refreshments so please call in to see us.

Health Planning: The second round of consultations for the DEFRA funded project are well under way and receiving extremely positive feedback. Farmers are being contacted to book these visits in. Please get in touch if you have not yet heard from us and want to book in advance.

Calf housing

One area where many farms consistently fall down is calf rearing. The main issue we see is a lack of dedicated space on the farm for a calf rearing operation.

On the farms that do it well we see low mortality and very good growth rates. Conversely on the farms that don't do it well we see high mortality and poor growth rates. The calf is either a dairy replacement or a beef animal – both are potentially very



valuable and fully justify the investment of time and money.

There are many different feeding systems – milk, milk replacer, fermented milk – but one major issue is the poor environment the calf is reared in. All too often the calves are tucked away in the corner of an unsuitable building where there is enough space. This invariably means that the environment is compromised. Once this happens the calf is compromised and will be more prone to disease and poor performance.

What does the calf require from its environment?

- Clean, warm, dry and draught free but not stuffy conditions
- Always provide adequate ventilation for calves
- Calves aged less than three months should be isolated from older animals
- Convenient location to encourage quality care and observation
- Minimise manual labour

Do you provide this for your calves?

A calf that is dry will be comfortable in temperatures down to freezing. This requires a slatted floor or a floor with

a 1/20 fall. It also requires fresh bedding. Good ventilation is important as it will:

- Minimise levels of airborne infections
- Minimise condensation
- Aid evaporation from urine and faeces, bedding and water spillage
- Remove water vapour
- Reduce dust levels
- Create even air distribution

The air movement must take place above calf level – i.e. there must be no direct draught on the calf. The most common problem is housing calves in large sheds – “plenty of air” does not mean plenty of ventilation. Most shed have closed ridges, or restricted outlets, so stale air is not removed. This allows moisture, dust and infection to accumulate and challenge the calves. An open ridge is essential if the shed is naturally ventilated. Good ventilation is more important than trying to maintain a warm environment.

This is a quick look at calf housing. There are many more aspects to calf rearing. If you are unhappy with your calves performance please discuss with your vet.

Tony O'Loughlin – 07970492250

Grass

Grass. How much is it worth? By the time you read this article I would hope that most of if not all-dairy cows will be out grazing at least some fresh grass.

A question often asked is “How many litres can we expect to get from grazed grass?” This opens a can of worms. Depending when in the grazing season this question is asked will of course affect the answer. Very often unless the answer is 20 litres + we are viewed with suspicion as anti grazed grass and championing the need for extra concentrate feeding.

Let’s look at what we can reasonably expect from grass. Feeding cows at grass is in many ways more difficult than feeding during the winter. When feeding fresh grass there is a whole list of variables that can and will affect the amount and quality of the grazed grass available. There is a direct correlation between the dry matter of fresh grass and intakes. This can affect milk yield from grass. Dry matter can vary from as low as 17% in young lush spring grass to 25% later in the season. Interestingly enough the energy content doesn’t alter hugely, ranging between 11 and 12.5 MJ at most.

I know using averages can be dangerous but it provides useful general guidance, each individual farm should know its own potential milk from grazing. The variation was clearly demonstrated last year. In early June the average milk from grass peaked at M+15 lts. Within that average the milk yield ranged from barely providing enough for maintenance to an impressive M+26.5 lts.

Let’s take a cow giving 35 litres of milk per day. What should we feed her to

keep body and soul together? We want to maintain 35 lts of as good a quality milk as we can, perhaps get her in calf, or maintain pregnancy, to try and minimise weight loss, keep cell counts at an acceptable level – the list goes on. If we set an unrealistic expectation on what can be achieved from grass some of these aims will be put under pressure.

Figures widely available show that in the last three years there has been one month where it has been possible to achieve 20 lts from freshly grazed grass. If you are expecting M+ 20 but M+ 15 is more realistic the difference to the cow is huge. To maintain her milk yield the likelihood is that she will need to mobilise body condition to make good the shortfall. 1kg of body condition adds 28MJ (Mega Joules) of energy into the cows system.

It takes 5.5 MJ to produce one litre of milk. The extra energy from condition loss will make good the shortfall, possibly maintain milk production but she is now starting to mobilise condition, which we should avoid if at all possible. If she is nutritionally challenged for too long the immune system could come under pressure and bring with it problems, higher cell counts, Mastitis, perhaps problems with fertility.

To make the most of grazed grass where possible buffer feed, especially the freshly calved higher yielding cows. I know it is not always easy to do but it should pay dividends. If you can, aim for at least 15-20kgs of buffer feed per day. It is surprising how much buffer a cow will eat given the chance. Often it’s access to the buffer that can be an issue. Review how much grass is available and of what quality and be prepared to adjust the buffer accordingly. Turning all of this on its head why not set the buffer feed at a

Chop length of grass silage

Does this sound familiar. Work carried out over the last three years is indicating that grass silage should be cut to 20mm not the current norm of 25mm and certainly not longer.

The suggestions are shorter chop grass silage can improve dry matter intake and milk yield whilst helping to reduce rumen acidosis brought on by poor ration mixing and sorting. The only exception to shorter chop grass silage should be dairy farms that make wet grass silage as the only forage. It certainly sounds interesting and might be worth considering.

level and then let the cows top up with grass? Perhaps feeding the cows this way around will take at least some of the guess work out of how much grass is available, what the quality is and how much will or can they eat?

Finally bear in mind for a cow producing 25 litres of milk per day she requires over 200 MJ/day. To get this energy from good quality grass let’s say 12 ME. How much fresh grass will she need to graze per day?

@ 17% dry matter and 12ME = 100kgs fresh grass per day

@ 20% dry matter and 12ME = 85 kgs fresh grass per day

@ 25% dry matter and 12 ME = 68 kgs fresh grass per day.

Is this achievable? Of course it is. For how long that’s a different matter. How many days of the year can these intakes of that quality be guaranteed? And that’s to achieve M + 25 litres from grass.

Paul Baker – 07785751396

Raw material update

If the price is too good to be true, it probably is!

With raw material prices at an all time high this spring there is a temptation for other feed companies to use cheap raw materials, some of which have not been seen for a while.

Generally these materials are low in energy or have a low digestibility which livestock cannot fully utilise.

Examples are:

Raw Material	Digestibility	Energy
Malt Culms	38 %	11.4mj
Bread Waste	65 %	13.5 mj
Cereal by products	70 %	11.7mj
Oatfeed	35 %	6.1mj
Salseed Meal	55 %	10.4mj
Sheanut	68 %	6.2mj

Comparison

Wheat	94 %	13.7mj
Hipro Soya	93 %	13.6mj
Barley	86 %	13.2mj

Unfortunately there is no replacement for high digestible feeds in the modern dairy cow diet whether it's forage or concentrate.

Raw material prices

	February 08	March 08	April 08
Hipro soya	£261	£265	£303
Argy soya	£261	£265	£286
Sugar beet	£176	£185	£187
Soya hulls	£145	£157	£147
Rapeseed meal	£190	£196	£196
Wheat	£184	£184	£170
Barley	£177	£177	£160

Soya: The Argentine strike which seems far from being settled continues to impact on Soya prices. April and well into May prices will cost in excess of £305/t. I think it would pay to wait until the strike is over before making any decision on future requirements.

Soya hulls: With no Sugar beet available this summer the focus is very much now with Hulls, Citrus & Wheatfeed as a source of digestible fibre. Prices have remained static for a while, taking some cover for this summer wouldn't be wrong.

Wheat and Barley: Good news for livestock farmers with cereal prices reducing week on week. Lower demand from pig and poultry has taken pressure off the market with a bigger surplus of old crop forcing prices down. Forward prices at harvest should be closer to £130/t with the probability of a good harvest.

Molasses: Cost of Molasses this winter has been very competitive but we will see an increase in May of around £15/t. It still represents excellent value for money and is one of the best energy & sugar sources available.

Rapeseed meal: At the moment prices are remaining quite firm alongside soya. Reduced demand over the next few months will help pull prices back. There is no need to cover winter requirements just yet as I am confident the market will ease.

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(Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays)

