



# St David's Farm Newsletter

April 2009



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# April is the month for bull fertility checks

For spring calving herds hopefully calving is going well and the end is in sight! How was fertility last year as evidenced by calving spread this spring?

To maintain your good performance or improve it is now important to begin preparations for this years breeding time. Very important is observation of heats and pre-breeding checks of cows, but don't forget a fertility check for the bull. Studies show 20% + of bulls are subfertile/infertile, and this is not

surprising with many common conditions such as lameness having the potential to cause infertility.

Your bull may get some cows in calf but that is not good enough if he is also missing cows. We all know how costly late and empty cows are on dairy and beef units, and so identifying and replacing subfertile bulls has major potential cost benefit.

A Bull Breeding Soundness Examination aims to identify good fertility bulls able

to get lots of cows in calf quickly, while also preventing the disastrous losses by identifying sub fertile bulls.

What the Bull Breeding Soundness Examination entails is a full clinical examination including testes and internal sexual organs. We then use an electro-ejaculator to collect a semen sample for assessment of sperm quality under the microscope. This allows assessment of ability to serve and fertility. All that is needed is a decent crush with side access and a clean place with electricity to set up the microscope. April is the ideal time for Spring calvers to fertility check bulls.

**Jeremy Hamilton – 07843288610**

### Bull testing prices:

One bull £95.00  
Two bulls together £150.00  
Each additional bull £55.00



## Lambing issues

With the high price of lambs, replacements and even cull ewes this year now is a good time to access are you making the most of your sheep.

Most of our sheep farmers are running lowland flocks and should be aiming to achieve at least 175 lambs per 100 ewes to sale per year. Some of our clients are achieving 200 lambs per 100 ewes which are excellent results.

However, far too many of you are only achieving 145-155 lambs per 100 ewes. Even though these low percentages are close to the national average they are not economically sustainable in the

long term and is a huge waste of potential income!

Many farmers feel they would not be able to cope with more lambs, however if your system is set up correctly then there is no reason that you cannot achieve very high lambing percentages with little, if any extra labour. In the end most of the time and effort is the same if a ewe has a single or a twin.

Now is the time to look at your lamb numbers and look at how many lambs were born live, born dead or died after birth and for what reason. This can tell you a huge amount about what you are doing right or wrong with your flock and what needs attention immediately and for next year.

This article is far too short to spell out all the reasons and solutions for poor performance but this is one of the times where good veterinary advice really pays off.

Unfortunately far too many of our sheep farmers will only contact us when they have a disaster like an 50% abortion storm or 30% of their weaned lambs drop dead due to worm burden. Both of which I have seen in the last few months. By that time the damage is done and a huge amount of money lost unnecessarily.

For more information on flock health planning, faecal egg counting, fluke or any other health or production issue call me directly or ring the practice.

**Peers Davies – 07826 916 935**



## Calf health workshop

St David's Farm Vets are holding a small group training workshop on calf health on Wednesday April 22nd 10:30am to 3pm at Vortex Holsteins, Church Farm, Martinstown, Dorchester.

Topics covered will include management of the calving cow, prevention of calf diseases and treatment of sick calves. This will be a unique, high quality training event for farmers and stockmen supported by the Vocational Training Scheme. The cost is £25 including lunch, calf nursing equipment to take away and a certificate of attendance. Spaces are limited. To book please phone Jayne on 01392 872934.

## Faecal Egg Counts

Don't forget we offer Faecal Egg Counting inhouse at the practice.

This makes this service cheaper and quicker than before and so a very practical tool for managing grazing stock. Why worm stock that don't need it or worse think that they are OK when underperforming due to gut parasites?

A simple dung analysis will tell you next day what/if treatment is required. We can test samples from individual animals

and pooled samples from a group for all of the internal parasites for £18+VAT per sample. Contact Peers for worm egg count queries and help planning worm control for the grazing season.

**Peers Davies – 07826916935**



## Grass ahoy!

At the time of writing we are having a useful spell of dry weather. The sun is shining; ground will be drying out and grass will be "greening up".

After what seems like a long winter many will be keen to turn cows out to some grass. Producers on spot loads of blend with pricey, high inclusions of soya will be keen to get their protein from grass instead. This I can understand and frankly why not? Just the usual grazing caveats to remember if you will...

Firstly, it is useful to have some idea of grazing quality to know what to allow from it. We need to know what level of crude protein we have, at what ME and at what dry matter. Trickily, all of these values will vary often daily, along with sugar and fibre levels etc.

Secondly, it is vital to have control over grazing intakes. Intakes will fluctuate, depending on so many factors. i.e. weather conditions, quantity available to graze, quality of grass, time of year etc.

Thirdly, it's important to remember that whilst soya is currently expensive it does provide quality bypass protein of which there are minimal amounts in grazed grass. This bypass protein is required by the cow for sustaining milk yield and is the building blocks of milk protein.

Buffer feeding is the way to even out the variance in grazing intake, stabilising fibre and thus milk butterfat levels. In this buffer it's sensible to include some quality protein to make up for the shortfall from grazing alone. I feel that for high yielding cows requiring high and stable feed intakes and plenty of quality protein, buffer feeding should be turned on its head if grazing is to be entertained. Grazing should be the "buffer" to a sensible fixed level of TMR. Here's why grazing alone is a struggle:

A 45 litre cow needs 325 MJ's of energy for maintenance and production. Let's say she eats a fixed maximum of 10kgs of dairy cake in the parlour a day which provides 130 Mj's. She therefore needs 195 Mj's from grazing alone. It's a nice, warm dry day. Grass cover is ideal and energy is very high at 12.5ME/kg DM. 195/12.5 is 15.6 kgs dry matter intake required from grazing. Grass is 20% dry

## St David's notice board

- The St David's Farm Practice AI course in March was full and so we plan to run another course. If you would be interested in learning to AI please register your interest with Jayne so we can keep you informed of the upcoming course.
- Our *Calf Health Day* at Mosshayne was very enjoyable and feedback has been very positive. Discussion was lively with a good combination of basic principles and new ideas ensuring everyone learnt something new. Calf health remains a challenge on many farms and we feel the *Calf Health Day* gives a great opportunity to learn to tackle calf disease at source. We plan to run the course for our clients in Okehampton and Dorchester – please contact Jayne on **01392 872934** for more information.
- Trouble with mastitis? A Mastitis day practical course to look at lowering mastitis levels on your farm is coming soon. Watch this space...



matter as conditions are dry and warm. 15.6/0.20 is 78kgs fresh weight of grass intake required on top of 10 kgs concentrate. That's 88kgs total intake. This is a very tall order, and bear in mind that this is on an absolutely excellent grazing day.

As always, each farming situation is unique and grazing will have its place for many. Just a few thoughts to provoke some consideration.

**Charlie King – 07917 203790**

# Raw material update

**Soya** – After its peak of £320/t in January, Soya has now eased back to the late £280s. The continuing concern over the world financial markets and fluctuation of currency are both contributing to a very bullish market. Chinese imports of Soya during February 09 totalled 3.27 million tons; up 62% from last year. I suspect the usage of Soya for this summer on farm will reduce, so for a lot of you the forward winter price would be more of interest. November to April 2010 at approx. £265/t has created some interest in booking requirements. Generally customers have decided to stay spot for the summer. Strikes this week by Argentine farmers will cause export delays, making a short term price increase likely.

**Soya Hulls** – Whilst very popular this winter, hulls have remained fairly static price wise over the past couple of months. I believe this summer's demand will drop due to a more

## Raw material prices

	Jan 09	Feb 09	Mar 09
Hipro Soya	£320	£287	£288
Wheat Distillers	£166	£168	£169
Sugar Beet	£165	£165	£155
Soya Hulls	£112	£113	£110
Rapeseed Meal	£175	£183	£166
Wheat	£108	£106	£105
Barley	£102	£101	£100

competitive price from Trident on sugarbeet.

**Sugar Beet** – With prices too high this winter sugarbeet is now looking good value for money during the summer. As probably the best source of fibre for dairy cows it is an ideal buffer while making the most of summer grazing.

**Wheat and Barley** – I still believe there are large amounts of cereals left on farm unsold. Prices increased in early January but are falling back gradually. Further falls are likely during the summer. Next winter forward prices are between £128/£135/t which may not be far out.

**Molasses** – Apparently supply problems looking forward may well increase molasses prices, so large users should keep an eye on the market just in case you need forward cover. No summer prices available at the moment.

**Rapeseed Meal** – Having spiked at over £185/t rape is now over its technical position. With more crushing, recent prices have slipped away to the mid £160s. Summer levels are looking fairly attractive at around £150/t and next winter at £146/t. I think there is room for further reductions but it might be sensible to cover a little at a time.

**Steve Symons – 01884 256256**  
(Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays)

