

St David's Farm Newsletter

August 2009



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St David's clients in badger vaccine trials



DEFRA have outlined their badger vaccine plans and two of the trial areas (northeast of Exeter and west of Tiverton) will include clients of the farm practice.

We encourage those farmers involved in the trial areas to give it your support. However, we still strongly believe that much greater action than a badger vaccine trial is urgently needed in the short term to control the spread of this disease. This opinion is also fully supported by our representative body – the British Veterinary Association. The BVA “believes that humane, targeted and managed culling of badgers in some areas will be necessary if we are to reverse the increasing prevalence of bTB.”

The aim of this trial is primarily to assess the practicalities of deploying the vaccine, but it may also help to reduce the spread of infection in the trial areas. The trial will run over six pilot areas for five years starting it is hoped in summer 2010. As many badgers as possible in each sett will be trapped, marked and vaccinated with BCG over a series of nights. The process will be repeated each year to catch up with unvaccinated cubs. Trapping and vaccinating will be carried out by

contractors and funded by DEFRA. Farmers will be asked to voluntarily enrol in the trial.

BCG vaccine is a live TB bacteria attenuated to prevent it causing disease. It was developed way back in 1921 and has been widely used across the world with varying results to control TB in humans and animals. There is some scientific evidence that vaccination with BCG will protect healthy badgers from infection and so reduce the level of infection in the population as a whole and therefore the risks of transmission to cattle. It has no effect on badgers already infected with TB – these will have to die off. So why vaccinate infected badgers? The reason is because no easy test to determine infection in live badgers is available. The only existing test is the same slow and laborious skin test we use in cattle.

Why start with badgers? BCG is being trialled in cattle with some success and a vaccine could soon be available. However, this could only be used once a test to differentiate vaccinated cattle from infected cattle is developed and then only once EU law has been changed. Slow and difficult processes! The badger vaccine is likely to be available next summer and those testing and trade related barriers do not

need crossing so role out can start straight away.

There are concerns that trapping could increase movement (the perturbation effect) or shedding from infected badgers. These effects are very unlikely – badgers have been trapped in trials over many years and do not show signs of stress or increased movement from their social groups. There are concerns that vaccinated badgers could shed the BCG bacteria and sensitise cattle to the skin test – the vaccine has been trialled to check that shedding does not occur.

Vaccinating wildlife is a piece in the long term jigsaw required for controlling and hopefully eradicating TB and it is important that this trial runs successfully. To some farmers understandably vaccinating wildlife may seem trivial. But we must learn from other diseases - on the continent rabies was successfully eradicated using oral vaccines in food baits for foxes. TB is a very different disease to rabies but we need to be positive about aiming for eradication in the long term even if the current political situation is allowing the disease to run rampant. More information on the trial and maps of the trial areas can be found on the DEFRA website.

Emily Simcock – 07968 305227

Heifer rearing

Rearing dairy replacements is a significant financial investment with costs around £1000. There are two aspects to consider in minimising the costs of rearing. Firstly reducing the number required for rearing and secondly the time to first calving.

Planning for the number of heifers required is clearly impossible in TB infected areas, but it is still important to look at the age structure of the herd and the reasons for forced culling. Why are cows being lost? To reap the benefits of the rearing costs heifers need to reach their fourth lactation, but about 20% never make it to the end of the first. The key to ensuring these heifers are productive and healthy lies in tight management from colostrum intake on day one through to minimal

stress at calving. What is the mortality rate from birth to first calving?

Key to a stress free transition into the milking herd is calving at the correct weight and condition score, so reducing the time to first calving must never be at the expense of adequate growth. But, if heifers are achieving the target weights then calving at 24 months has been shown to be the best age to achieve maximum lifetime yields, whilst keeping rearing costs to a minimum. How do you know their growth rates? Do you accurately measure the weight of heifers for service? Is it obvious when a group is slipping behind their target weight gain?

Monitoring growth rates is essential and it can be done by measuring weights, chest girths or heights. At the practice we are looking into investing in

sophisticated electronic weighing equipment to enable us to provide you with a comprehensive heifer monitoring service. This would be part of a programme of monitoring right through from birth to pregnancy diagnosis. The aims are to detect problems early for example with calf health, disease or nutrition in the individuals and groups and then provide you with targeted treatment and advice. In batch calving herds this will provide information for early intervention if growth rates fall and in year round herds will pinpoint optimum service dates. Overall we hope it will reduce both calf mortality and the losses of heifers from the milking herd.

If you have ideas about the type of service you would like as we develop our heifer monitoring programme then please email emily@stdavids-farmvets.co.uk



St David's notice board!

Calf health workshops cost £25

Thurs 17th September: Cornworthy, Nr Dartmouth from 11.00 until 15.00.

Thurs 24th September: Near Exeter from 11.00 until 15.00.

Mon 5th October: Northlew, near Okehampton from 11.00 until 15.00.

Mastitis for milkers cost £25

Tues 8th September: St Davids Farm Practice, then Mosshayne Farm, near Exeter, from 10.30 until 16.30. We are also hoping to schedule more of these in the South Devon and Okehampton areas.

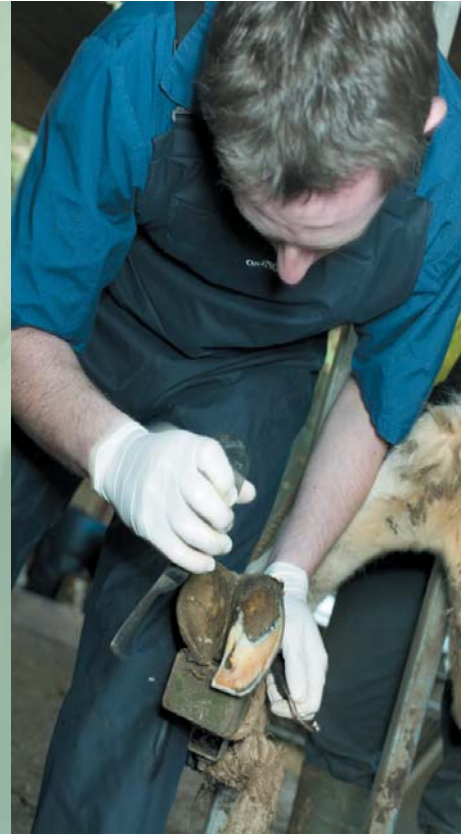
2-day foot trimming course

17th & 19th August near Exeter.

Show dates

Come along and see us at:

- The Okehampton Show, Thursday, 13th August
- The Kingsbridge Show, Saturday, 5th September
- The Dairy Show, Shepton Mallet, Wednesday, 7th October



Noroseal teat sealant launched

Norbrook have released a teat sealant to rival Orbeseal. We are now stocking 'Noroseal' which will be cheaper and we are passing that saving on to our clients. This means those using recommended drying off protocols of dry cow tubes plus teat sealant for all cows will save money. For anyone not currently using a teat sealant it is a great time to start. If you require more information about whether your herd would benefit from this product please speak to your vet.



Noroseal is available in bucket and syringe packs

Staff new and old



Paula Rogers

Jayne will be leaving St David's at the end of August. She has been with the practice for 8 years but is now moving even further into Somerset and too far away to commute to Lymstone. She is very sad to be leaving the team but is looking forward to new challenges.

Many of you will have already spoken to Paula Rogers who started at the end of May. Paula will be taking over from Jayne when she leaves. A new member of staff has been employed to manage the efficient dispensary service, we will introduce her in next months newsletter.

Worm egg counts

Please remember that faecal egg counting can save you money on unnecessary worming. Our in-house tests are £18.00 per sample and can be done the same day, giving you a clear picture of which wormers to use and therefore avoiding resistance build up.



For more information contact Peers on **07826 916935** or email peers@stdavids-farmvets.co.uk

