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ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY

## Getting cows into the milking parlour

Smooth and efficient loading of the parlour makes for calm cows and happy farmers! There are a number of things that can influence how cows go into the parlour and attention to them can save time for all concerned.



Anne Abbs

- Allow maiden heifers to have a 'supervised sniff'. Lots of things happen to heifers at calving time – they have a calf, change management group and meet lots of big, scary cows, someone starts to handle their teats. Going into the parlour for the first time whilst all that is going on can be the icing on the cake – no wonder some of them play up! Allow them to have a look and sniff at the parlour at least a couple of times in advance of calving, maybe with a nice quiet cow to calm things down. Put some food in the feeders if you have in parlour feeders and let them find it, they maybe much more eager to come in when they do calve. If milking on a rotary, let them have a ride round with a quiet cow standing next to them.
- Make the parlour entrance as wide and inviting as possible, don't expect cows to squeeze through a narrow dark doorway. Cattle tend to move towards light so make the parlour lighter than the collecting yard but ensure there are no shadows from pipework etc across the start of the herringbone or they will baulk at the entrance. Avoid steps up into the parlour if at all possible.
- Make the collecting yard the same width as the parlour and have a slight rise towards the parlour if possible. Wide collecting yards funnelling into narrower parlours can result in blind corners at the entrance where cows loaf and get in the way of other cows that are trying to get in.
- If you have a backing gate, consider dropping it behind a smaller group of cows sufficient to load a side rather than the whole group of waiting cows. If all the cows are pushed as one group, then the back cows can become crowded without the front cows moving on.
- Keep the parlour environment as calm as possible. Banging on pipework and rattling cows' legs frightens nervous cows and dissuades them from coming forward. If the last few cows have to be pushed in, try to exit the parlour from the exit side and go round rather than coming out into the oncoming traffic and pushing cows away from the entrance.
- If loading is staggered between sides in a herringbone, start to prep the first cow when about 5 have loaded rather than waiting for the whole side to load. Cows will still tend to load and this is more time efficient and less frustrating for the milker.

# MastDecide – A tool for targeted Mastitis treatment decisions

Prudent use of antimicrobials is important to reduce the development and spread of resistant bacteria and mastitis in dairy herds remains a leading cause for antibiotic use. Traditionally treatments have been aimed at maximising cure rates and reducing SCC's thus leading to the majority of farms have a 'blanket' treatment protocol for cows with clinical mastitis. Furthermore there is extensive evidence to show that infections with most gram negative (E coli) infections do not necessarily benefit from use of antibiotics and may even exacerbate the toxin production and inflammation.



**Bruce Richards** 

Of course faced with a case of mastitis, it is important to know which type of bacteria – gram negative (E coli) or positive (Staphs and Streps), you are dealing with. Nearly all cases benefit from supportive therapy, including anti-

inflammatories (NSAIDS), fluid therapy and stripping the quarter. Knowing early on if a case requires antibiotics or not is useful in implementing selective treatment decisions and strategies. On Farm Rapid Culture tests can be very useful in reaching this decision and having more specific and targeted treatment protocols.

#### MastDecide - Rapid on Farm Culture

This is an on farm mastitis test kit which will provide a rapid, reliable and cost effective differentiation between gram negative bacteria - E coli, Klebsiella and gram positive bacteria – Staphs and Strep which then allows for better informed treatment decisions. After an initial outlay on a small Egg Incubator (£35-£40) each test costs less than £10, requires a clean (untreated) milk sample, 5 minutes preparation and 8-14 hours incubation time. Interpretation is straight forward, relying on a simple colour change giving you 3 diagnostic options and 2 treatment options:-

### **Double Pink**

#### Single Pink

No growth or other less common bacteria



Gram Negative E Coli or Klebsiella



#### **Double White**

Gram Positive Staphs or Streps



#### **Treatment Options – Antibiotics or not**

Every mastitis case should immediately receive a zero milk withhold anti-inflammatory and supportive therapy at the onset of mastitis and a sample collected. Review the samples after incubation, often by the next milking, and potentially all single pink and double pinks would **NOT** require antibiotic treatment. Cases not needing antibiotics will not need a prolonged withdrawal. Less antibiotic treatment (potentially up to 50% less clinical cases getting antibiotics), less risk of antimicrobial resistance and the potential quicker return of milk to the tank all have a positive return. Severe grade 3 mastitis cases should always be treated aggressively and with veterinary advice.

A treatment protocol (and flow chart) should be drawn up with your vet and agreed by all staff involved with milking and treating cows.

Example Protocol

	Abnormal Milk Only	Abnormal Quarter	Sick Cow
Grade 1 – mild changes to milk (clots, colour, con- sistency	Х		
	ACTION - Take Sample & Culture. Record cow info TREATMENT – NSAID and wait for test result. Follow treatment protocol		
Grade 2 – Moder- ate changes to milk and udder (heat, pain, swell- ing)	Х	Х	
	ACTION - Take Sample & Culture. Record cow info TREATMENT – NSAID and wait for test result. Follow treatment protocol		
<b>Grade 3</b> – Severe changes to the	Х	Х	Х
cow (sick, tem- perature, off feed, sunken eye etc.)	ACTION - Take Sample & Culture. Record cow info TREATMENT – NSAID and treat cow according to treatment protocol and veterinary advice		

Speak to one of the vets to discuss sourcing the test kits, incubator and your protocols and flow charts.

# **Weaning lambs**

Weaning will now be on the horizon for many sheep farmers. It is important to look ahead to ensure plans are in place to make sure the process is as smooth as possible. The main aim is to wean lambs without negatively affecting growth rates. There are several factors which interplay in the success of weaning.

At four weeks old the lambs' rumen is fully developed. Once lambs are eight weeks old, they are getting most of their nutrients from grass and creep feed. It has been shown that lambs grow better off their mother once they are 12-16 weeks of age.



**Annie Kerr** 

#### Jobs to do before weaning:

- Weigh lambs to check their growth rates target 300g/day in the first 8 weeks of life. With a 20kg target weight at 8 weeks of age.
- 2. Speak to your vet about faecal worm egg counts to determine if the lambs need wormed or treated for coccidiosis. Discuss with your vet what the most suitable product to use would be.
- Vaccinate against Clostridia and Pasteurella. From 3 weeks old lambs should receive two injections, each of 2.0 ml, separated by an interval of 4-6 weeks.
- 4. Administer trace element supplementation if necessary.

#### Have a plan to reduce stress.

Weaning is a stressful time for any animal. At weaning lambs and ewes should be separated with lambs sent back to the field which they came from so they are familiar with the surroundings and can easily find the water trough. Because of the immaturity of the digestive system at birth, it can take up to three weeks for the rumen to transition onto a new feed type. Evidence shows that lambs perform better on feed that they have experienced with their mothers. The ewes should be taken out of sight and sound of the lambs to minimise calling to each other. Management tasks such as vaccination or worming should be performed a few weeks before or after weaning. The stress caused at weaning can impede the immune response, particularly to vaccines, thus increasing the lamb's susceptibility to disease.

#### **Ewe MOT**

Ewes should be turned out onto bare pasture or housed in a clean shed for 48 hours after weaning to ensure their udders have dried up with minimal chances of infection being introduced. Looking out for any signs of mastitis is important and prompt treatment with an antibiotic and anti-inflammatory is necessary. A couple of weeks post weaning, ewes should be inspected for any signs of mastitis e.g. a hard bag which may indicate that there has been damage to the mammary tissue; these ewes should not be bred from again.

Their teeth should be checked to ensure they do not have a 'broken mouth' which is an indicator of age and will impede their ability to eat. Feet should be checked for any lesions and they should be weight bearing evenly on all four. Any underlying lameness issues will make them less likely to stand for the tup during the next mating season. Any ewes which have a hard bag, damaged teats, broken mouthed or are lame should be marked for culling as they are less likely to get in lamb next season, more likely to experience ill health and can be a source of infection for other ewes. In addition, any ewes which have had a vaginal prolapse should be clearly marked and culled as these sheep are more likely to have a vaginal prolapse the following year.

#### Assessing body condition score (BCS)

The ewe BCS can negatively affect lamb growth if it is not correct as the ewes will be competing with the lambs for grass. As overfat and lean ewes will underperform, assessing body condition score of ewes at weaning will allow time for condition to be altered pre-tupping. It is a good idea to split the ewes into thin, fit and fat groups to feed accordingly. It is generally accepted that it can take seven to eight weeks for a ewe to gain one body condition 'score' on unrestricted grazing. 1.0 body condition score is about 13% of bodyweight, so for a 70kg ewe that is about 9kg. Ewes that are tupped at the correct BCS tend to have lambs with a better birth weight during the following lambing season. An investigation into why your ewes are lean, especially if there are quite a few, is a good idea. Faecal egg counts can be done by your vet to assess worm or fluke burdens. In addition, Johne's or Maedi Visna maybe be underlying causes which may be diagnosed via blood sampling.

#### Taking lambs through to finishing

As animals age, their efficiency at converting feed into growth declines. Therefore, younger animals need to preferentially be on higher quality forage if possible. High grass digestibility is vital to the growth potential – routinely measuring and controlling sward height is important. It is more economical to feed the lambs to ensure they are growing effectively early on compared to feeding hard post weaning.



In a set stocking situation, target sward height should be 4-6cm; where grass is above or below this, minimise losses in lamb performance by supplementary feeding or shutting off additional fields for silage. Consider growing forage crops for finishing lambs if grass species makes it difficult to keep highly digestible feed ahead of lambs.

Lambs with lower birth weights will need more energy to grow to the desired finishing weight. Ewes with a low BCS often give birth to smaller lambs so doing pre-lambing bloods and assessing BCS before lambing is important to avoid this issue. In addition, lambs which are growing slowly take longer to reach finishing weight. 100g/d growth rate lambs per day need twice as much energy to reach the SAME weight as those growing at 300g/d. Reasons why lambs are slow growing should be investigated. Common causes:

- Nematodirus (black scour)
- Round worms
- Scald,
- Pasteurellosis,
- Joint ill or navel ill.

#### Recording

You cannot manage what you do not measure! It is important to be able to pinpoint where losses are occurring during the production cycle in order to improve each year. Recording events at and around lambing gives an invaluable insight. Events which should be recorded:

- A. Number of ewes scanned empty
- B. Scanning percentage
- C. Lambing percentage (no of lambs born alive)
- D. Number of Lambs turned out
- E. Number of lambs sold

#### Table 1. Industry targets for lamb losses

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Industry Target
% empty ewes at scanning (A)	<2%
Lamb losses from scanning to birth (B-C)	<5%
Lamb losses from birth to turnout (C-D)	<5%
Lamb losses from turnout to weaning (D-E)	<3%
Lamb losses from scanning to rearing (B-E)	<13%

(taken from AHDB)

#### Conclusion

Weaning lambs is a critical time and attention to detail is needed to ensure stress is reduced and growth rates are not impacted. The longer lambs are kept on farm; the more they cost you to keep. Maximising efficiency by controlling preventable diseases is key to profitability.

# **Staff News**

#### Dan Griffiths

We regret to inform you that Dan will be moving to pastures new mid June. I am sure you will join us in wishing him well for the future. You may even still see him about in the local area.

#### Philip Wilkinson

Phil has recently qualified as a Mobility Mentor through the AHDB Healthy feet programme. The programme has been developed to help dairy farmers reduce the number of lame cows on their farms by identifying and applying the right management techniques. If you are interested in the Healthy feet programme or would like to find out more information please contact Phil at the practice.

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