



## Bluetongue meeting

On the 9th of April we shall be hosting an evening meeting, focusing on Bluetongue Disease, and how this might impact your farm. Currently the outbreak is contained in the south-east of England, but as the warmer weather arrives it is more likely to spread, as the disease is transmitted by midges. The meeting will be held at The Wynnstay Arms, Ruabon at 7.30PM. Please let us know if you are intending on attending.

## Nematodiosis

Nematodiosis is caused by the parasite *Nematodirus battus* and causes intestinal damage leading to profuse, watery diarrhoea. The parasite is transmitted from the lambs grazing the pasture in the previous season to those grazing in the current season, making it particularly difficult to control. Larvae are ingested from the pasture and develop into adult worms which produce eggs. This takes as little as 14-21 days, resulting in greater pasture contamination. These eggs will either develop into infective larvae which can infect lambs immediately or they will lie dormant until the following Spring when they can infect the new crop of lambs who have no natural immunity. Thankfully once lambs have been exposed they

begin to develop natural immunity however, *Nematodirus* is capable of causing a great deal of damage, and even death, before this immunity develops.

So when is the risk? The highest risk period will vary slightly from year to year based on two significant factors.

- Environmental conditions
  - If the weather suddenly changes from cold frosty mornings to mild, warmer spring weather a mass hatching of parasites on the pasture occurs
- Lamb age/weaning
  - If his mass hatching occurs around the same time that lambs are beginning to consume significant amount of grass (6-12 weeks) then the risk will be very high
- Other risk factors
  - Grazing lambs on the same pasture which they were grazed on last spring
  - Presence of other parasites e.g. coccidiosis
  - Other stress, triplets, fostered lambs etc.

### What to look out for?

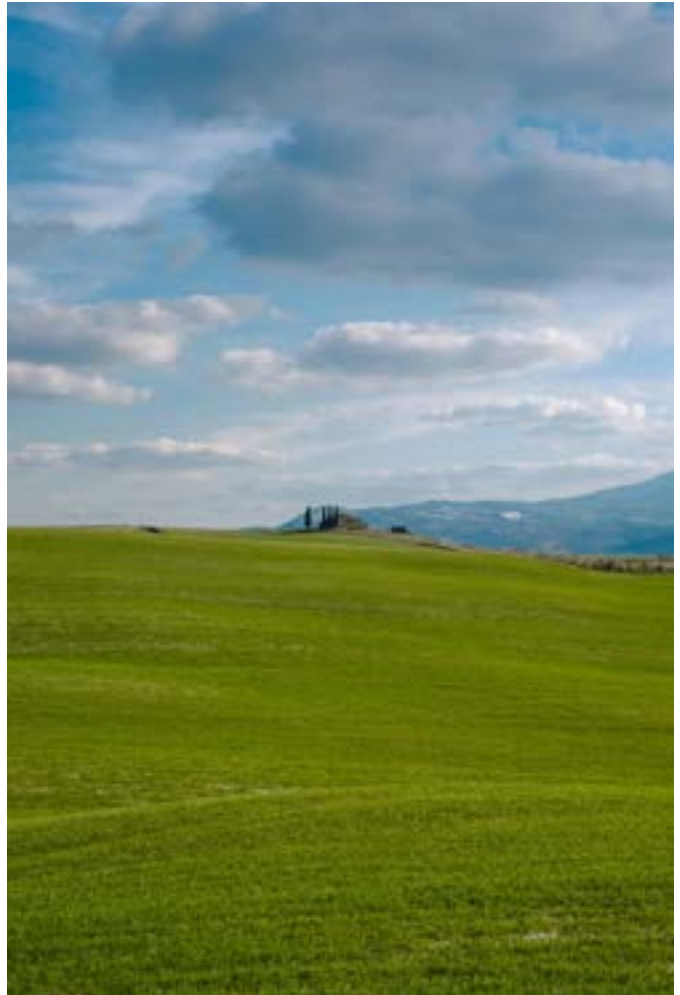
The main clinical sign is sudden onset profuse diarrhoea, this will develop into gaunt condition, dehydration and dull lambs. Once worms are ingested they takes 2-4 weeks to begin producing eggs so faecal egg counts are not helpful for acute disease however they should be used to monitor response to treatment.

If treatment is required a group 1 (white) should be used. When treating lambs weigh them and dose accurately to ensure that treatment is effective and to help protect anthelmintics from resistance. Faecal worm egg counts 7-10 days after treatment are vital for determining efficacy of the treatment.

# Grassland Management in Wet Weather

The one thing every farmer – no matter what you grow or raise, can agree on is how wet this winter and spring has been so far. It has presented us with many challenges, and as it is still not drying up, many people are starting to wonder how to cope with such wet ground when running stock.

- If spring grass is 4cm long and growing, it will have enough energy (12.5ME) and protein (20%+) for lactating ewes. Supplementing ewes with 2kg (fresh weight) of fodder beet a head a day is an effective way to balance the protein available.
- Mild weather will lead to regrowth. But if eaten too early, it will use up the plant's energy reserves and stunt the plant later in the year – reducing the feed available at tugging time in the autumn.

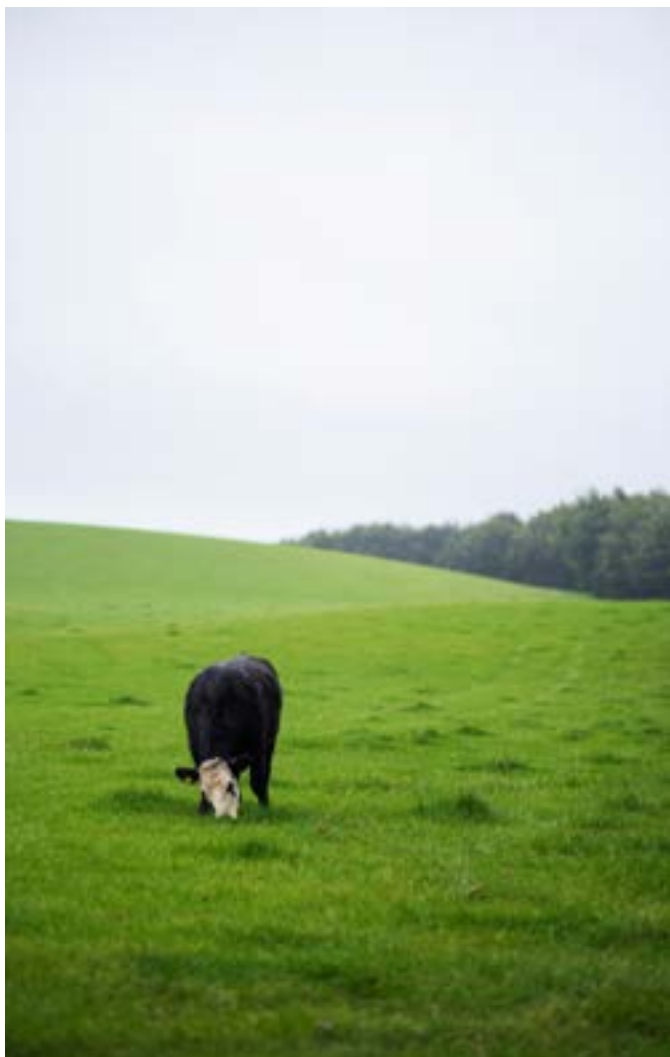


## Poaching

There are many things to consider when it comes to managing pastures in wet weather, the first of which springs to mind is poaching. Poaching can account for up to a 20% reduction in grass growth rates, which in the long term can be hugely detrimental to grazing systems and can have lasting effects later in the year. Some tips on how to initially reduce poaching are:

- Consider setting aside a sacrifice paddock for supplementary feeding, that needs to be redrilled. This helps to limit damage elsewhere.
- Look at introducing grass seed into bare patches around feeders and troughs
- Even using cheap grass seed can help to prevent weeds growing on bare patches, that would encroach once spring and warmer temperatures arrive.
- Avoid using fixed resources (ring feeders etc) if possible. This increases poaching and uneven grazing. Drag troughs and moveable feeders are ideal for use in these conditions
- Bale graze on bare areas to help encourage full utilisation of the ground





### Grazing Strategy

To help with reducing the poaching and optimizing your use of the pastures available, various management strategies can be employed. A key issue here is over-use of a singular gateway – if possible, create multiple gateways to the fields to prevent over-use alongside the following suggestions.

Increasing stocking rates on the ground, but grazing for a shorter period of time can help improve the efficiency of grazing and reduce the amount of time for poaching to occur. For example, giving stock access to a much smaller area but moving them every day instead of every 3 days.

### Lameness

Warm and mild weather also leads us to another issue – lameness. This weather provides the perfect environment for bacteria such as those that cause digital dermatitis and contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD) to flourish.

Combine this with potentially increased stocking density either in sheds or on pasture and you can end up with a lameness pandemic. Our top tips for preventing this are:

- Treat early – as soon as you notice signs of lameness
- Separate from others and isolate immediately
- Reduce spread – don't turn out any animals with current lameness issues – the wet ground is only going to help spread it to others within the group
- Disinfect foot-trimming equipment regularly – ideally in between each animal but at minimum clean them between groups.

### Parasite risk

Nematodirus, as we have already discussed, is likely to be an issue this spring, but don't forget about coccidiosis in your lambs. Those between 4-8 weeks old are at the highest risk and symptoms are very similar to other gastro-intestinal parasites: scouring, weight loss, decreased appetite and lethargy.

- If your farm has previously had coccidiosis diagnosed, then it would be sensible to treat preventatively this year. Lambs at four to five weeks of age can be given single dose of a toltrazuril drench.
- Worm Egg Count (WEC) any lambs with scour to differentiate between Nematodirus and Coccidiosis for effective treatment.

