

Just like that another year has gone by, from all of us at Daleside Vets we would like to wish you all a Happy New year. New years resolutions are often based upon personal achievement but why not choose one to improve something specific to the health and productivity of your farm this year, e.g. reduce the incidence of lameness, regular body condition scoring etc.

Additional help with testing

It's a busy time of year for TB testing as many of you will have your annual test coming up within the next couple of months. If you require additional help this can be arranged. Huw Roberts is an experienced stockman and is available if an extra air of hands is needed.

Feeding Ewes in late pregnancy

With lambing time just around the corner for most of our clients, it's time to plan that all important late pregnancy diet. Diet plays a big part in the profitability of future lambs. Body condition scoring is a quick and easy way of assessing nutrition in ewes, however, during late pregnancy it's more complex and

metabolic blood testing is a great way to get a snapshot of what nutrition your ewes are truly getting from the feed provided. Feeding the correct diet and achieving the correct energy density is vital to limit metabolic conditions such as hypocalcaemia and 'Twin Lamb'.

Ideally blood sampling should be done 2-3 weeks before lambing is due to start. Earlier than this, sheep are not yet in the high-risk period and so there is the potential that some energy problems could be missed. If the ewes are sampled later than this the opportunity to make nutritional adjustments for the benefit of the flock are limited. From these bloods we assess the levels of five individual parameters.

These enable us to determine the energy levels, protein intake, along with magnesium and copper levels.

Forage analysis is another invaluable tool used to calculate the correct diet. The variety in forage quality is huge and must be considered when trying to balance out the deficiencies with concentrates. We highly recommend getting your forage analysed to tailor the need for concentrates around this. Submission packs are available through the practice, speak to a member of the team for more information. Funding is available as part of the farming connect clinics to contribute towards metabolic testing.



Managing young calves in cold weather

In cold weather, calves require more energy to keep warm, this energy is directed away from growth and the immune system. The graphic below shows the thermal comfort zone of calves at different ages, or in other words, the temperature where the least amount of energy is used on controlling body temperature.

Calves less than three weeks old are the most vulnerable to temperature changes, as you can see, the lower critical temperature is 10°C and so during the heights of winter the average daily temperature will be quite some way below this. To account for the energy being diverted away from growth and the immune system, feed an extra 50 g/day of milk replacer, or 0.33 L/day of whole milk for each 5°C temperature drop below 15°C. Calves over three weeks of age aren't quite as susceptible to the cold but still require extra feed - 50 g/day of milk replacer, or 0.33 L/day of whole milk for each 5°C temperature drop below 10°C.

Housing

Monitoring daily temperature during periods of cold weather is a great way to ensure calves are being fed enough, installing a min-max thermometer located at calf height makes it quick and easy to calculate the amount of feed needed for that day. If snatch caving is a protocol used on your farm, then drying the calf is vital, without the cow doing this naturally the calf is at risk of heat loss. There is a fine line between fresh air and draught, and we appreciate that it one of the hardest things to achieve when thinking about calf housing, however, it is

one of the most important elements of calf housing and is vital to get it correct.

Calf jackets

Calf jackets are great to help keep calves warm and dry when temperatures fall below 15°C, make sure your calves are receiving sufficient energy and have dry bedding to keep warm as these calf jackets should not be an easy fix for these issues. Having a farm protocol in place is a good way of ensuring that jackets are used correctly.

- Calves less than three weeks old should be given priority when temperatures drop below 15°C
- Calves older than three weeks will only need jackets if the temperature is below 5°C

Perhaps most importantly jackets must be kept CLEAN! In between uses they should be washed down and then washed according to the manufacturer's instructions. We recommend washing at a temperature of at least 60°C as anything under this will not kill cryptosporidium.

Here at Daleside we are very proud to have our Calf Club programme. This includes fortnightly visits by our Vet Technician Charlotte, to weigh the calves, monitor health issues and assess colostrum intake by taking blood samples of any calves under a week old, clinical meetings tailored to topics of your choice and a monthly vet report. By working alongside farms in this way we have seen great improvement in calf health and growth rates in participating farms. To discuss the programme in more detail please contact the office on 01978 311 444.

