gateway vets

Gateway Gazette

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Bon Voyage Rhys

I hope by the time this newsletter is printed the opening line of "The current hot dry conditions" have been replaced by an inch of rain to settle the dust. If not there will be a few challenges including some animal health problems. We are also well accustomed to these dry spells and strategies to minimise the impact of these events. Otherwise mating has finished for dairy farms and we look forward to pregnancy testing now to see how well we have done. The sheep and beef sector is enjoying strong prices at the moment so it is pleasing to see buoyancy for this industry.

After four years Rhys and Charlotte have made a joint decision to return to the United Kingdom. We would like to acknowledge his contribution to the practice over that period. Rhys has been good fun to work with but I'm sure we will see him out this way again following that team with the red jerseys who can't seem to beat the All Blacks.

Amy Edwards is joining the team moving all the way from Ashburton. Amy has five years experience, specialising in Dairy Medicine and we are looking forward to having her on the team.

Gateway Vets would like to wish you all the very best for Christmas and a prosperous New Year. Hopefully you will get an opportunity for some time off and enjoy the fantastic part of the world we live in.

Furry friends and festive frolics

What to watch for over the silly season

Summer and Christmas are fast approaching with the usual mix of glee for time with family and friends and concern for when it will next rain. But this can be a busy and risky time for your canine companions as they scavenge under the BBQ and steal chocolate from under the tree.

Risk #1- Too much chocolate

Chocolate toxicity is a well-known danger to dogs. The active ingredients cause a buzz like coffee but with much worse results. Chocolate can cause tremors, seizures and even death for your dog. Dark chocolate is the most dangerous, however even white chocolate will upset their stomach. Please call us ASAP if your dog eats chocolate.

Risk #2- Too many ham bones

Ham bones, as well as other bones, given at Christmas time can clog up your dog. This leads to a nasty and long trip to the vets for an enema to help the bones pass. Cooked bones are more likely to splinter and can also perforate the bowel. Please do not feed cooked bones to your dogs and minimise the post-Christmas lunch gorge on scraps from plates and leftovers.

Risk #3- Too much heat

As the sun gets hotter so do our dogs. Overheating can easily occur, especially as work never ends on the farm and when it is play time, they still love to run. Your dog may pant excessively, gums will go red and they can collapse. Time is critical with overheating as permanent damage can occur or internal bleeding and death. Make sure your pets have enough shade and water on hot days.

Along with this reminder to take care with your dogs; avoiding bones, chocolate and too much sun, we wish you and your family and your Rover a merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Pink Eye

The current hot, dry spell continues then the conditions will remain very conducive for pink eye.

Pink-eye is primarily caused by a bacteria Moraxella Bovis in cattle. Transmission is via direct contact or more usually by flies. There are multiple strains of Moraxella Bovis with significant variations in the pathogenicity and infectivity. Other concurrent infections like IBR can predispose cattle to pink-eye, increase the severity of disease and the likelihood of successful treatment.

Last autumn a district problem was a contagious and pathogenic strain of pink-eye which was refractory to normal treatment regimes. We see pink-eye all year round but the peak incidence is over the summer. Dust, wind, ultraviolet light, long grass and plant pollens all cause damage to the surface of the eye pre-disposing cattle to infection.

Unweaned calves are particularly at risk because of their close proximity around the calfeteria. Many calves also receive meal in feed bins which are dusty and again place calves in close proximity.

Pink-eye in sheep is caused by a Chlamydia species but risk factors and transmission are similar. Different treatment regimes are used to control pink-eye in sheep because of a different causal organism.

Last autumn was damp and cool but pink-eye was a particular problem. A percentage of clinical cases from last year will be still be carriers. These along with the prevailing conditions and early cases being reported has raised a concern that pink-eye this year could be severe.

We would encourage our clients to be particularly vigilant. Clinical cases need be identified, treated and isolated. New stock arriving should be kept away from existing cattle if pink-eye is present. New stock arriving presents risk because isolation has limited effectiveness. This is because of the role of flies as a vector on infection. Bulls introduced to the herd should not be clinically affected. Ideally these bulls would also be vaccinated with Piliguard Pinkeye-1 Trivalent an effective pink-eye vaccine.

There are a number of control measures for pink-eye, treatment options as well as an effective vaccine. If you have cases which don't immediately respond to treatment or require specific advice we would encourage you to ring the clinic before a severe outbreak occurs.

Lambs

Internal parasites

Parasite burdens on pasture are highest in warm and wet conditions. Larval concentrations are highest at the base of the sward and around faecal dung areas or areas where the stock camp. This means that even though conditions are dry, when there is increased grazing pressure lambs eat down to the very base of the sward increasing their larval intake significantly.

Clinical signs of a worm burden include general ill-thrift, diarrhoea, dags, weight loss and poor weight gain. It is worth remembering that signs can be subclinical, so faecal egg counts are a valuable tool for measuring the burden in your stock and assessing the need for a drench. With resistance to drenches being an increasing problem it is wise to do a follow up faecal egg count to check that your drench is working. How effective your drench is also determines what percentage of your stock to leave undrenched to maintain effective refugia on farm. Refugia is the term used for the population of worms maintained on farm that are unexposed to drench and therefore remain susceptible to drench. These worms can breed with drench-survivor worms and dilute genes for resistance.

Flystrike

One of the sequelae of diarrhoea is dag formation around the tail and hindquarters potentially leading to flystrike. The area becomes wet and smelly and attracts blowflies. Other factors also predispose to flystrike including fleece rot and dermatophilus infection (body strike), footrot, urine staining around the prepuce and ram fighting (poll strike) among other reasons. Eggs are laid and fly larvae quickly follow. Flystrike challenge is highest from November through to March. Early signs are obvious irritation, seen as stamping, tail twitching, rubbing and biting the affected area. Affected sheep soon stop eating, seek shade and are visibly depressed. Oozing wounds cause fluid loss and dehydration. Tissue damage and ammonia secretions from fly larvae cause a toxaemia, all of which lead to death.

Prevention is paramount. Along with standard preventative measures (crutching etc) timely spraying/jetting with an insect growth regulator such as Cyrazin or Cyrex Liquid can provide protection for up to 12 weeks depending on the challenge. Organophosphates, such as that in Maggo, are generally preferred for treatment of clinical cases due to their instant action. Cyrex can also be used to treat clinical cases as it contains Spinosad which rapidly kills maggots. It is especially useful for strains that are resistant to organophosphates. Sheep with flystrike often benefit from antibiotic and anti-inflammatory therapy in addition to standard treatment and nursing care.

If you are having trouble with worms or flies, or are interested to investigate your worm burden and drench resistance status, give us a call to discuss what is happening on farm and what might be the best course of action to reduce these animal health problems and therefore increase health and growth in your young stock in particular.

Vitamin B12/Cobalt

Young sheep are the most susceptible stock class to cobalt deficiency when compared to older sheep and cattle. Cobalt is the essential component of vitamin B12. In vitamin B12 deficiency the production pathway to make glucose is blocked. This is responsible for the starvation/wasting away aspect of cobalt deficiency. The general signs of deficiency are loss of appetite and poor growth even though feed appears adequate. In sheep you may notice watery discharge from the eyes and poor growth in wool which appears white or washy. Anaemia and fatty liver may develop.

More commonly the problem may be confined to poor weight gain in lambs after weaning. Diagnosis is made through a combination of history, clinical findings and blood testing. Supplementation via Vitamin B12 injections is an effective way of treating and preventing cobalt/B12 deficiency.

If you suspect a degree of B12 deficiency in your lambs give us a call to discuss the diagnostic and treatment options.

Thiamine deficiency

This spring we have seen quite a few cases of thiamine or B1 deficiency in calves. Thiamine is important in metabolism and red blood cell function.

Low thiamine can occur if calves have a sudden change in diet, if there is high sulphur in the feed or water or with certain toxic plants, like bracken fern. These all affect the rumen microbes' ability to make enough thiamine for a growing animal.

Locally, we often see this disease in late spring as the ryegrass goes to seed, although it may happen at other times of the year and in any class of stock.

Low thiamine leads to polioencephalomalacia (or swelling of the brain) and death of brain cells. For obvious reasons we often shorten this disease name to "polio." The swelling of the brain causes a sudden onset of neurological signs.

- muscle tremors
- star gazing
- flickering of eyes
- convulsions
- blindness
- dullness
- wobbliness
- circling
- head-pressing
- coma
- death in one to two days without treatment

Some of these signs are similar to ryegrass staggers, lead poisoning, low vitamin A or a bacterial infection of the brain so please contact us if you are seeing these signs in your calves.

Blood tests are unreliable and impractical for confirming polio, so it is often diagnosed by the response to treatment.

Treatment is by supplementing thiamine/B1. Please note that B1 and B12 are different- so injecting B12 will not help or rule out polio as a cause of neurological disease.

Call early as if treatment is delayed the swelling can lead to permanent brain damage. Early treatment by supplementing thiamine should lead to a dramatic and full recovery.

Introducing Amy

In January we will welcome Amy Edwards to our practice. Amy qualified in the UK five years ago and spent her first four years as a farm vet in the South West. She has spent 15 months working in New Zealand, with the last calving season in the Ashburton area. In her time here Amy has developed a love for tramping in our beautiful outdoors and can be found most weekends somewhere in the Southern Alps. She is looking forward to moving to Geraldine and embracing all the challenges of rural mixed practice.

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