

March 2024 Newsletter

5 point lameness plan for sheep

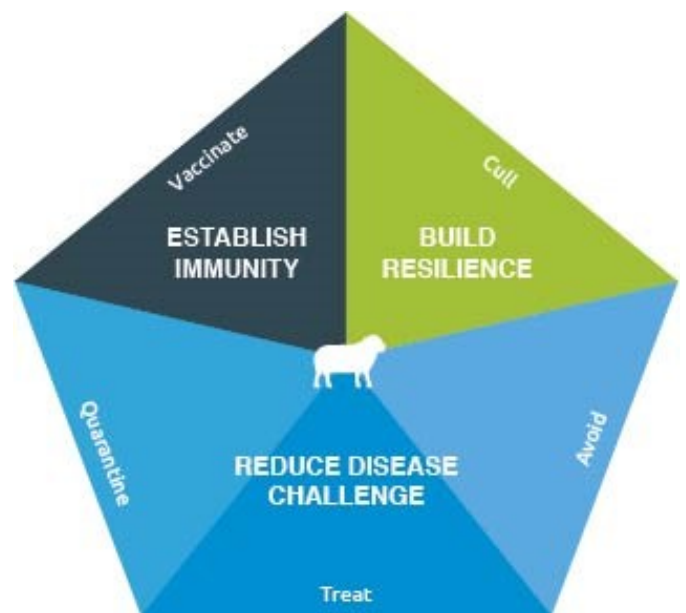
Laura Smith

Lameness in sheep is a common problem in many flocks with 92% of farmers reporting that they have an issue on their farm.

ADAS calculates the cost per affected ewe as £89.80, with this figure representing the cost of treatment, extra labour involved, and any subsequent replacements costs, as well as production losses. These include reduced fertility, reduced daily live weight gain, and increased days to finishing. For a 300-ewe flock with 10% lameness this is annual cost of £2648.

The 5-point plan is a method of taking control of your lameness problems. The plan looks at reducing the disease challenge, building resilience and establishing immunity within the flock.

FarmVets SouthWest has two accredited Lameness Reduction Advisors who can visit your farm and carry out a mobility assessment on your flock, in order to assess and quantify your level of lameness. Together with you they will talk you through the five-point plan and create a focused approach tailored to the needs of your flock and farm. The created action plan will help you focus your attention on key areas in order to build a margin of safety.



The cost of this service is £35 per hour, with the initial assessments and action planning taking between one and two hours. There is funding available through the sustainable farming incentive scheme. If this is a topic you would like to look into further, please contact the office on 01278 663399.

Uniform Agri meeting

If you are a Uniform Agri user there is a meeting on Tuesday the 12th March at Sedgemoor Auction Centre that will be covering the **new ketosis list alert for dry cows** on the Uniform Agri app. The workshop will start at 10.30am (try and get there 10/15mins before so can grab a tea or coffee) and it will finish between 1/1.30pm.

Calf Milk Powder

David Taylor

Many studies have shown that the faster a heifer calf grows from birth to weaning, the more milk it will produce when it enters the herd. Looking at the calf growth figures that our Vet-Techs have measured on farm, this can vary from 500 to 900 grams per day (we target 600g per day), with each 100g increase worth between 80-150 litres in that animal's first lactation.

The most important feed in the young calf's life is obviously milk, but most calves are reared on milk powder and there is a bewildering array of milk replacer powders on the market. The better the quality of the powder, the more likely it is to realise the potential growth rate of the calf but which one should you go for? Whey-based or skimmed-milk-powder (SMP) based? Or a mixture? It can look impossibly confusing. The good news is that there is plenty of good research out there that allows us to make a judgement.



Whey or SMP?

The answer is quite straight forward, both work well. One study compared whey-based powders to SMP powder and various mixes of the two and found no difference in calf performance. What matters is the quality of the ingredients. You may see various claims about the benefits of one type over another but in real-life terms, they both work well.

High Fat & Protein?

There is no obvious benefit to feeding anything above 20% protein and 18% fat, although to achieve very high growth rates (greater than 900g/day) then some sources recommend higher protein levels. However, there is always the option of just feeding more of any type of powder rather than setting up to higher protein powders.

Why are some powders cheaper than others?

The price difference comes down to the quality of the ingredients. Milk based ingredients are more expensive, so sometimes you may see plant-based ingredients. Plant based proteins, e.g. wheat gluten and soya, and some vegetable fats can be difficult for calves less than 3 weeks of age to digest. Wheat gluten is an acceptable ingredient in milk replacers but the majority of protein should come from milk based ingredients. Pea protein concentrate is a red-flag ingredient as it often precipitates out and forms a sludge. Similarly, wheat and pea flour are not great ingredients either. Of the vegetable oils, palm and coconut oil are almost as well digested as milk fat but beware rapeseed oil as it has been shown to be of lower digestibility in young calves and may also reduce the digestibility of protein in the powder. Check that ash levels in the powder are no more than 8%, as this can lead to dietary scours in calves. Fibre levels should be as low as possible but don't put too much store in them without checking the ingredients, some poor quality powders can have a very low fibre level and some good ones quite high fibre levels.

General Rules



Whatever powder you use, always prepare it according to the manufacturers instructions and be consistent with timing and water temperatures etc. Always clean and disinfect the feed equipment and store powder in a dry, clean area.

Milk powder should mix well and easily without residue at the bottom and please don't stick knives in the teats to increase the speed of feeding, it can lower growth rates and increase scours! If you would like advice on your milk powder (or whether you should feed whole milk) please contact one of our offices. Also, it is worth considering our Vet-Tech services – calf disbudding, vaccinating and weighing, amongst others. If you don't measure it, you can't manage it. Getting some calf weights done allows you to see if you are hitting targets and it means you can do something about it if you are not.

MilkSure Courses

We are running MilkSure courses regularly and our next one is fully subscribed. If you require a MilkSure course please call the office and we will add your name to a priority list for the next meeting.

We are also running regular **Medicines Courses**. If you require a medicines course please call and book onto the next meeting

Vet tech service deals

Freeze branding will be £6 + VAT/ animal for March.

Vet tech vaccination service free of charge for over 100 head of cattle.