



# Highgate Veterinary Clinic

## Farmers Newsletter - March 2008

### Colostrum Supplementation in Lambs



You will be all aware of the importance of colostrum intake and to supplement certain lambs. This can be done in various ways.

#### Powdered Colostrum Supplements

These are widely used and are convenient but are of variable quality especially with regard to levels of immunity provided. Because they are nutritional products rather than medicines, they do not have to meet any set standards and can make exaggerated claims on packaging and in adverts. It is probably best to assume that if this is the only "colostrum" a lamb gets early in life, its antibody level is less than ideal. This can lead to problems with watery mouth, joint ill etc.

#### Cow colostrum

This can be very valuable but a few points need to be borne in mind.

It is less concentrated than ewe colostrum so larger volumes need to be fed.

Colostrum from some cows can cause anaemia and death in lambs. It is not common and many farmers take the risk but a simple and quick test or a small sample (costs £25 and takes 3 days) can tell you if it is safe. Colostrum can be frozen while you wait for the results and then used as necessary.

It can be stored frozen for several months but needs to be defrosted carefully. Ideally leave at room temperature for a couple of hours or stand it in warm water. Do not cook it in the microwave as it destroys the antibodies.

#### Ewe Colostrum

Some ewes have spare colostrum, e.g. those with singles or with lambs that won't suckle. An injection of 1-1.5 ml oxytocin into the muscle helps with milk let down so that more can be drawn out and fed to their own or other lambs. This is the best colostrum with antibodies specific to the bugs on your farm so share it around if possible. Surplus ewe colostrum can be frozen. When you need extra, use the powders but be aware of their limitations and try to ensure lambs receive at least some ewe colostrum.

### Sudden Deaths in Cattle



Every farmer knows the feeling of rising in the morning to find a dead animal. It could be a calf, fattening bull or dairy cow. They rarely show outward signs of illness.

Annually there are over five thousand unexplained sudden deaths investigated in the UK for anthrax. Positive cases are rarely found. It is thought that over three times this number of cattle die each year for "no reason." That means on average, a 100 cow unit will see one sudden death every four years.

Clostridial infection is one of the most likely causes of sudden death. Spore forming bacteria, the Clostridial organisms can lie dormant in animals, soil, water and feedstuff for weeks to years. Often the disease acts unpredictably with sporadic deaths but outbreaks can occur with certain risk factors and an increased risk is seen around turnout.

The majority of sheep farmers vaccinate regularly against clostridia and in Ireland vaccinating cattle is also the norm.

Several clostridial vaccines are available that are cheap and very effective. COVEXIN-10 protects against all the main clostridial organisms giving a years protection. The vaccine can be used from two weeks old. A primary course requires two injections 4-6 weeks apart with a single, annual booster. It is advisable to use the vaccine 2-8 weeks prior calving. This will give passive protection of the calf for up to 12 weeks via the colostrum.

The cost of the loss of one new calved heifer would more than cover the cost of vaccinating a 100 cow unit with 60 followers for 8 years.

Remember all sudden deaths should be investigated for Anthrax before the carcass is moved. Please report all sudden death cases to the practice and one of the vets will organise for an Anthrax investigation to be undertaken.

### This Month: March



If the weather warms up, keep vigilant for blue tongue.

We have a presentation on the website which will help you identify the symptoms.



Consider using fly repellents such as Spot on or Swish to help protect your stock



Husk vaccination is due this month.