



Highgate Veterinary Clinic

Farmers Newsletter - April 2008

Blue Tongue Disease



Sarah and Mark recently attended a vets meeting on blue tongue virus (BTV) in Cheshire and although there have been local farmers meetings discussing the subject, we thought that it was worth giving you some of the important points again.

Blue Tongue is a viral infection spread between ruminant species by certain species of midge, which can travel on average 10-15km per day.

There are 24 distinct serotypes of BTV and immunity to one does not convey protection against the others.

BTV 8 is the serotype present in Northern Europe and the UK. It is considered to be one of the most virulent strains. The other serotypes are not a threat to the UK in the short term.

In 2007, 27% of Belgian sheep flocks showed signs of disease. Of the individual sheep that showed clinical signs, 50% died. The rest showed loss of weight and took at least six weeks to recover. Infected rams and bulls become infertile and it is unlikely they ever recover. This may be very pertinent to this area as BTV is predicted to reach here in September. Many pregnant animals either abort or produce weak offspring.

Cattle are less likely to show clinical signs but do become infected and produce a lot of virus and so are important in the spread of BTV.

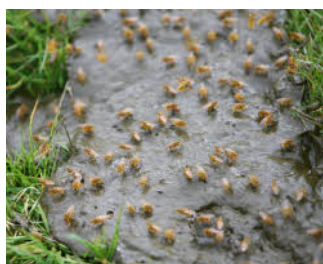
As it is viral, treatment options are limited. Due to sore mouths, animals have difficulty eating and drinking, therefore fluid therapy, anti-inflammatories and TLC are required. Antibiotic treatment is necessary to prevent secondary bacterial infections.

Under EU law, vaccination against BTV is only allowed in Protection Zones (PZ). This is because antibody tests cannot distinguish between a vaccinated and infected animal. It may also be because unlike the present vaccine, vaccines in the past have been live and capable of reverting to wild strains and so causing disease. The present vaccine is a dead vaccine and not able to cause disease. This also makes its use in pregnant animals safe unlike the live vaccines which could not be used in pregnancy.

2.5 million doses have been made available to be used in the far south east of England. There will be regular deliveries from now on. At the moment, vaccination of animals in the North West is low priority but this may change if control in the south and east is not successful.

Vaccination is totally voluntary and will be done by the farmer. If you wish to vaccinate your animals once the vaccine is available in this area, we encourage you to register the required amount with us so that we can make an order ASAP once we are able.

All stock down to 1 month old can be vaccinated. Cattle require 2 shots 3 weeks apart but sheep only need one. Protection occurs fully after the last shot and annual boosters are needed. The estimated cost is up to 66p per dose when purchased in the 50 dose vials and up to 98p per dose when bought in the 20 dose vials.



What can you do now?

Midge control doesn't seem very practical. Butox PO has been shown to kill midges and is useful to know if you're already treating to control flies but it cannot stop all midges. Sealing animals into midge proof buildings doesn't appear practical either.

Be vigilant. If any of your animals start to show typical signs, contact us ASAP.

Biosecurity.

Remember, the virus could travel in an infected bought in animal and then spread the virus to the local midges.

When travelling to and from auction marts, it could be possible to carry midges with you. Using an environmental spray such as Oxyfly in the trailer may reduce this possibility.

This Month: May



Consider Footvax as part of your footrot control policy.



Remember free tests on ewe blood samples are available for diagnosing the causes of abortion.



Consider controlling flies on your farm early in the season to reduce population numbers later.



If you are using a strategic worming policy, mark turnout and future treatment dates on a calendar. The timing of treatment is important.