



Highgate Veterinary Clinic

Farmers Newsletter - December 2004



We would like to wish all our clients a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Copper Deficiency and Copper Poisoning

Last month Mark attended a meeting of vets to discuss copper in cattle and sheep. Copper deficiency has been identified as the cause of poor growth rates and infertility. The country as a whole is experiencing an increase in the number of flocks and herds diagnosed as having copper deficiency but at the same time, the incidence of copper toxicity is also increasing.

It is widely agreed that true copper deficiency of soils in the UK is rare and that molybdenum (Mo) acts as an antagonist, blocking the effect of copper in the body. The mechanism for this is a subject of heated debate. Most scientists agree that Mo attaches to copper in the gut and prevents its absorption. Some say Mo not only does this but is also

absorbed into the body and acts directly as a poison.

These points may seem academic but they influence the arguments over the best ways to measure body copper levels and treat deficiencies. Put simply, blood samples give you a very rough guide to copper levels and different tests may be better than others. Liver biop-

sies are better than blood samples as copper is stored there.

So what is the best way to diagnose copper deficiency? Well even the boffins like a suck it and see approach. They recommend the approach in the table below.

If you think your stock could benefit from additional copper, please speak to us for advice.

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Identify the problem and decide whether it can be attributed to copper deficiency. |
| 2 | Rule out other causes of the problem. -For example, energy deficiency is the major cause of infertility in dairy cattle. |
| 3 | Make sure that you know the total level of copper in the animal's diet. Toxicity often occurs when there are multiple copper supplements e.g. in the cake, a mineral bucket and copper injections. |
| 4 | Blood sampling may highlight that copper levels are already high and that extra copper may lead to toxicity. |
| 5 | After all that, treat a proportion of the herd or flock, stand back and see whether extra copper improves things in those animals compared to the rest. As fertility and growth rates are influenced by many factors, blanket copper treatment followed by improvements, may not mean the animals were copper deficient! |

Liver Fluke

Liver condemnation due to fluke is being monitored in slaughterhouses across the country and collated by No-

vartis. October's results are shown in the table below. Cattle liver flukes are alarmingly high. It is well known

that cattle are able to deal with fluke infection better than sheep. Affected cattle rarely drop dead but their production suffers and they excrete hundreds of fluke eggs onto the pasture each day. This means that cattle can be a major source of infection to sheep

with more dramatic consequences. If you find it necessary to fluke sheep on your farm, please fluke your cattle as well.

Triclabendazole (Fasinex, Endofluke) is the only drug, which kills all stages of the fluke life cycle in the animal

| Abattoir | Carlisle Butchers | National Average |
|---------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Sheep Oct 04 | 9.6% | 5.4% |
| Cattle Oct 04 | 14% | 20% |

Scabivax Revamp

The people from Schering-Plough have started from scratch to create a new vaccine to control orf called Scabivax Forte. The new vaccine contains additional "wild" strains of orf to give better protection.

It comes in 50 dose bottles with a longer shelf life. In addition, they have produced a new ergonomically designed applicator, which they claim is easy to use, leak proof, gives consistently accurate

dosing and lasts for up to 20,000 sheep. Lets hope this is better than their last attempt to improve application.

