



Highgate Veterinary Clinic

Farmers Newsletter - May 2007

Free Tests Available

Disease surveillance on farm is not often done because of the expense of testing and then farmers often convince themselves that its best not to know what diseases are on the farm – what you don't know won't harm you! But that is definitely not true.

Knowledge is a powerful weapon. Many diseases are now endemic in herds and flocks i.e. they're always present causing grumbling problems and affecting productivity.

Its just as important to know what diseases you don't have on your farm because you can then take precautions to keep that disease out.



At the moment the following tests are being offered free of charge.

- Bulk milk testing for Leptospirosis, BVD, IBR antibodies.
- Blood tests screening for BVD and Leptospirosis.
- Blood test screening for Enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis in sheep.
- Calf faeces testing for Rotavirus, Coronavirus and E. coli.

A subsidised blood test for calf pneumonia viruses is also available. Five calves can be tested for BVD, IBR, RSV and PI3 virus for £50.

There are other screening tests which are not free but are still worth while. For example, there is a Johnes Disease bulk milk test available for about £10. It's a quick way to see if your herd has this chronic and expensive disease.

Dry periods – How long should they be?

There's been a lot of talk in the press recently about shortening dry periods in dairy cows. Keeping cows milking for an extra month could increase the milk sold in a year. Studies do show that reducing dry periods to five or six weeks did not affect the yields in the subsequent lactation.



A major player in advocating short dry periods is Intervet who's dry cow tube, Cephaguard DC has just received a new licence withdrawal period for milk of 35 days. This tube appears to be a good tube and has helped to reduce mastitis and SCC in a couple of problem herds.

It appears that shortened dry periods reduce the loss of appetite at calving so reducing related problems such as displaced stomachs, infertility, milk fevers etc.

Instead of feeding two diets throughout the dry period only one diet is fed in a shortened period and so in theory simplifying feeding.

Looks great but the data up to now comes mostly from the USA. We're not aware of large UK studies. The diet has the most important influence on disease at this time but we have not had any information on the recommended dry cow diet.

The concept of shortened dry periods should not be used as an excuse for poor management that means that cows are given short dry periods because they've been forgotten!

In addition, we are all more aware of the public's perception of farming. What will be their response to hearing that "the rest period" of dairy cows is being reduced so that the farmer could squeeze out some more milk. If we had enough convincing evidence that the net result is a healthier and longer living animal we could defend this new idea but at the moment this evidence appears lacking.

This Month: April



Look out for scouring lambs and make a diagnosis. Is it coccidiosis or Nematodirus? Before guessing and wasting money- get it tested!



Ensure you have a worm control plan for your youngstock before turnout. There are lots of products out there and you could be spending more money than you need to on anthelmintics.



Look out for scouring calves after turnout. They can suffer from coccidiosis as well.



Too early for flies? If this weather continues, maybe not!