

Schmallenberg Virus (SBV) – today we have seen the first suspected case of SBV on one of our farms in a calf born with fused joints in both hind limbs. The APHA are offering **free of charge testing** of samples from aborted or **deformed foetuses** where SBV is suspected, so we have sent samples off from this calf. We have also found high levels of antibody to SBV in a group



Stillborn lamb with fused joints and twisted spine due to SBV infection

of young cows and heifers where a high percentage were barren at scanning. The outcome of infection with SBV is likely to vary depending on the stage of gestation when animals are exposed to infection. If it is early in gestation, the most likely effect is that the embryo will die resulting in more barren cows or ewes, whilst if infection occurs further into gestation the result is likely to be deformed foetuses

Responsible use of antibiotics

As we approach lambing and calving time, many of you will phone the practice with a list of veterinary medicines that you wish to order. And often this list is based on what you used last year, and the year before, and the year before that! But the question is, are all these medicines justified or needed? **Responsible use** means regularly reviewing animal health and medicine use and identifying areas where changes could be made that would reduce the use of antibiotics. This might mean fine tuning the feeding of pregnant ewes to ensure that they are getting enough protein to produce quality colostrum, or introducing a vaccination programme in cows to reduce the risk of scours in young calves. The last thing that we would wish to do is to increase the level of disease on a farm, but equally, we aren't happy to see antibiotics used as a substitute for good management.

So, we are introducing a policy whereby **every farm will be visited by a vet from the practice at least once a year to review animal health and medicine use**. At the first of these visits, we will draw up a list of medicines that can be routinely supplied, with the conditions they are to be used for, dose rate, withdrawal etc. Thereafter, this list will be reviewed as necessary, but at least annually. For those of you who are members of FABBL, this is a

scheme requirement. We will offer you different levels of visit at a fixed price depending on numbers of stock, how many species you have and whether you require a written health plan as well. These visits can be combined with visiting the farm for another reason, but for us to get a full picture of what is happening on your farm, we will need to dedicate time to looking at the stock and your mortality and medicine records – so this isn't something that we can just do at the end of another job without prior arrangement.

Blanket use of antibiotics for the prevention of watery mouth or joint ill in lambs is a problem. Many of you do it as a matter of course and are very reluctant to stop doing so but there is no question that there will soon be regulation banning the use of antibiotics to prevent disease. We have a number of large, prolific indoor lambing flocks that do not routinely treat every lamb – so these farms are proof that it shouldn't be necessary.

Watery mouth is avoided by:

- having **ewes at the correct body condition score** at lambing (BCS 3 indoors)
- **feeding adequate levels of protein** to ewes pre-lambing
- managing lambing ewes so that ewes and lambs mother up without interference either from other ewes or from people
- **good hygiene** in the lambing shed
- controlling infections such as Enzootic Abortion and Toxoplasmosis as weak lambs are more susceptible to disease

It isn't always obvious when ewes are underfed protein in the last few weeks pre-lambing, but a shortage of protein will result in poorer quality colostrum and an increase in the risk of disease in lambs. By analysing blood samples collected from ewes 2 to 3 weeks before the start of lambing we can determine whether the diet is meeting requirements. The lab cost is £120 for testing up to 20 ewes. When we come out to take the samples we'll also check ewe body condition and assess the housing and feeding set up.

Attention to **cow condition, protein level in the diet** and **shed hygiene** are just as important for spring calving suckler cows. In addition, cows can be vaccinated pre-calving against rotavirus and E.coli, increasing the level of antibodies produced in colostrum, so boosting protection to the calf.

Attention to **selenium and vitamin E levels in cows** is also important and we'd recommend blood sampling a few cows 4 to 6 weeks pre-calving to check that levels are adequate.