

FARM ANIMAL NEWSLETTER

Nematodirus

The Nematodirus risk in the area is currently **high**. Animals most at risk are lambs over six weeks old. Please speak to one of our vets if you have any concerns.



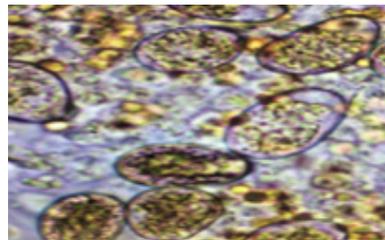
Keep an eye on the SCOPS website for further information

www.scops.org.uk



Lambs are at risk of cocci from around 3-12 weeks of age. Initially lambs are likely to encounter cocci from ewes shedding cocci into the environment. Once

infected there is a 'multiplier effect' where the cocci rapidly replicate in the lambs and then shed huge numbers of cocci eggs on the pasture.



Diagnosing it

Based on a combination of history and clinical signs alongside faecal egg counts under a microscope.

Coccidiosis in calves and lambs

What is it and signs of the disease?

Coccidiosis (cocci) is caused by a protozoan of the group known as Eimeria.

In both lambs and calves these microscopic creatures cause damage to the lining of the intestines by reproducing in the cells lining the intestines. The degree of damage caused to the gut is linked not only to the species of Eimeria but also the burden your lambs or calves encounter.

If the burden is severe animals can present as dehydrated, weak, inappetent and may progress to recumbency and death. Signs of ill thrift, weight loss, poor growth rates and scouring are more commonly seen.

When is it seen?

In calves coccidiosis is usually seen post weaning at times when the risk factors for the disease are high. Factors such as stocking density, contaminated environment, stress, concurrent disease burden, mixing groups of animals of different age groups and typically wet areas around feeders all increase the likelihood of infection.

Preventing it

Try to prevent successive crops of lambs and calves grazing the same pastures year on year. If housing animals, then ensure disinfection occurs between batches.

A degree of exposure to cocci is important to allow animals to produce a natural immune response. When consuming enough creep, medication with Deccox can allow a low level of cocci exposure for an immune response to develop without disease occurring.

Treatment

Successful treatment is often linked to the degree of damage that has occurred prior to treatment. Even when cure is achieved there may well be reduced growth rates. This means diagnosis and treatment should be sought as soon as possible.

Once a diagnosis of cocci has been determined then treating with either Toltracol (toltrazuril) or Vecoxan (Diclazuril) is usually advised. Both are given as a single oral dose. One of the team will advise on which product is best for your individual farm situation.

Importantly, animals should be removed from the source of infection and environment disinfected to prevent reinfection.

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Castrate and dehorn legislation

Many methods of castration and dehorning are regularly performed at this time of year but it is important to know when a certain method can be used so that you can stay on the right side of the law.

Castration

Rubber ringing is used in calves under one week of age. Use in calves over that age can cause pain and distress and increases the risk of complications – in particular tetanus. Minimal restraint is required but you must make sure that both testes are present in the scrotum.

Burdizzo is the method most likely to fail and should not be attempted by untrained personnel as unlike ringing and surgical castration there is no way of confirming that the procedure was successful. In calves under two months of age this procedure can be performed without anaesthetic (over two months it must be performed by a vet).

Surgical castration, must be performed by a vet with anaesthetic.

Dehorning

Dehorning (removing a formed horn) should never be a routine procedure, as it causes significant pain and should only every be performed by a vet. Chemical disbudding is a caustic soda paste that burns away tissue, importantly it should be noted that the paste will burn anything it comes into contact with and should never be applied in rain. This method is not recommended and only for use in calves under 1 week old.

Hot iron is by far the most common method of disbudding, local anaesthetic must be used and pain relief is strongly recommended. The procedure should be done before the defined horn tissue has formed. It is recommended that training be sought before attempting this method.

Straw feeding in dry cow rations

It has been known for some time that maximising Dry Matter intakes in the run up to calving is essential to avoiding excessive negative energy balance in early lactation.

The importance of maintaining rumen capacity during the dry period cannot be overstated. However, due to the modest energy demands of pregnancy, dry cows with high energy intakes are at risk of gaining excessive body condition.

A number of studies have shown that overfeeding energy during the “far off” dry period does more harm than good, leaving cows at risk of diseases such as fatty liver disease. With this in mind, straw feeding during the dry period has become popular as a way of maintaining rumen fill, whilst avoiding excessive gains in body condition.

Whilst this can be a highly effective strategy, straw can have a negative impact on palatability and increase sorting, resulting in reduced dry matter intakes. When interpreting DHHPS

metabolic profile results, it is not uncommon for us to question straw preparation as a cause of poor transition period energy balance.

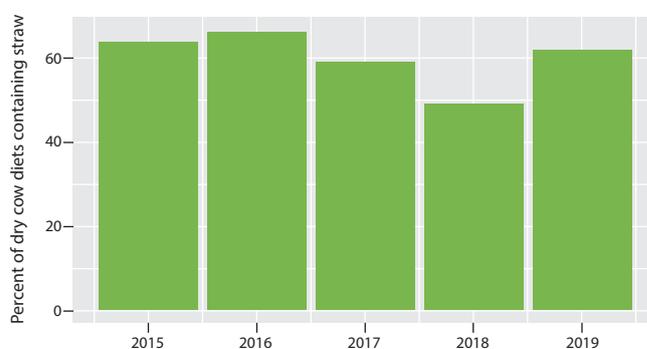
We have also noticed an increase in the amount of straw included in dry cow rations. To explore this in more detail, we analysed the 1288 dry cow rations we looked at between 2015 and 2019. As you can see below, the proportion of herds feeding at least some straw has remained relatively stable at around 60%. The obvious exception to this is in 2018, where this dropped to under 50%. However, with straw prices peaking at £90-100/tonne in the summer of 2018, this is hardly surprising.

What is interesting is that the average amount of straw fed remained relatively stable at 3.7 kg fresh weight (FW) between 2015 and 2017, but the figure in the graph below shows that straw feeding increased by 0.5 kg over the past couple of years.

This would suggest that feeding increased amounts of straw is becoming more popular. Given the increased amount of straw being fed to dry cows, it is worth reviewing best practice to ensure that intakes and energy balance do not suffer. A recent study in Canada compared intakes and energy balance in dry cows fed two diets consisting of 36% maize silage, 29% wheat straw and 35% concentrate (on a DM basis), with the only difference being the straw length: chopped using a 10.16 cm versus 2.54 cm screen. The groups achieved Dry Matter intakes of 15.0 and 15.6 kg respectively (equivalent to 5.0-5.2 kg straw FW). However, intakes in the last week of pregnancy dropped faster and more dramatically in the 10.16 cm group, who also had worse energy balance in the third week of lactation.

The findings of these studies highlight the following key points to get the most out of feeding straw to dry cows:

- ✓ **Wheat straw is preferable to barley straw**
- ✓ **Ensure that straw is kept dry and is of good quality**
- ✓ **Always pre-chop straw prior to adding to the mixer wagon. Target chop length of 0.5-5.0cm**
- ✓ **Monitor total ration dry matter and add water if the ration does not bind well**
- ✓ **Ensure at least 80cm/head trough feed space**



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