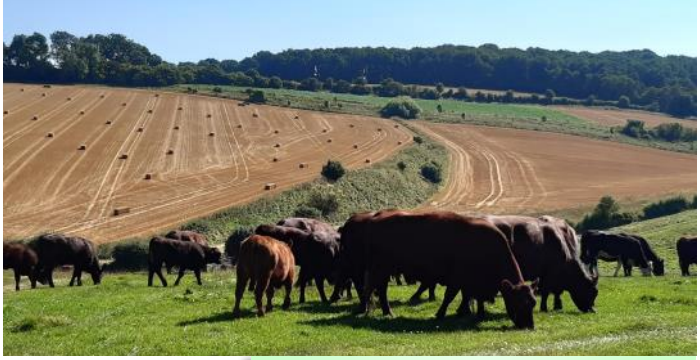

Beef Newsletter Autumn 2021

Autumn is rapidly advancing, and with it comes many management tasks that are performed this time of year. This edition looks at some guidance for those tasks, opportunities for proactive control over the season's challenges and the importance of infectious disease screening. We also discuss the introduction of genomics to the beef sector.

You may have read the recent Farmer's Weekly article on how analysis of a farm's information guided a change of breed. Much information is readily available on farm and does not require hours of number crunching to be useful, so this edition looks at ways to use it proactively. Please tell us on clinical visits or through the advisory package if there are topics you would like to see covered in a newsletter or on-farm meeting.

Tom Warboys
Veterinary Surgeon

Beef News Autumn 2021

- Infectious disease screening
- Autumn management tasks
- Genomics in the beef sector
- Autumn calving reminders
- Dispensary Seasonal Offers
- News from the Rounds
- Making use of on-farm information - part 1

Infectious disease screening – why is it important?

As well as causing overt clinical signs in some infected animals, infectious diseases such as BVD, Johnes and IBR can reduce the productivity of a herd through more subtle subclinical effects, such as reduced fertility or poor live weight gains.

Knowing the status of your herd when it comes to disease is crucial. Undetected carrier animals such as BVD persistently infected calves (PIs) can cause havoc whilst remaining undetected.

So how do I know if there is disease in my herd? For BVD, IBR and Leptospirosis the first step is usually a youngstock screen. This involves taking a blood sample from at least 6 animals aged between 9-18 months (ideally between 9-12 months). Samples are tested for the level of antibodies to disease, essentially asking 'have these animals ever met these diseases?' It is vital that youngstock screens are carried out on homebred stock, as bought-in stock may have been exposed elsewhere and will confound the results. Sampled animals must also be unvaccinated, as it is impossible to differentiate antibodies generated due to vaccination from those acquired due to natural infection.

Where a farm calves in 2 blocks and the groups do not mix, it may be advisable to sample 6 calves from each cohort; we can advise on this further.

The easiest time to carry out a youngstock screen is at the annual TB test, however if your testing window means that stock will be of the wrong age at the test, a separate visit to blood sample 6 animals is a relatively quick job. For **Synergy beef package members** sampling can be incorporated into one of the annual visits.

Johnes disease screening is carried out at a whole herd level with all adult animals blood tested for Johnes antibodies. It is very important to time a Johnes screening prior to, or at least 45 days after a TB test, as the tuberculin used can interfere with the Johnes antibody test. The screen could still be carried out at the time of the TB test but must be done on the first day.

There are, or have been, a few schemes and initiatives incorporating disease screening. These are listed below:

BVD Free: This a voluntary scheme aiming to eliminate BVD in England. Test results are uploaded onto a searchable database allowing buyers to ascertain the BVD status of herds and individual animals. It is free to register and there is a minimal charge for uploading test results. For more information visit https://bvdfree.org.uk/

CHECS Accreditation: Herd accreditation is available for several diseases, adding value to the herd and providing buyers with reassurance. CHECS is the regulatory body that certifies and quality-controls CHECS licensed cattle health schemes in the UK and Ireland. It ensures the schemes used operate to the same set of technical cattle health standards. Visit https://checs.co.uk/ to find out more about the various health schemes available.

BVD Stamp It Out: This was a DEFRA funded initiative to reduce the incidence and impact of BVD in England, involving funded disease screening and farmer meetings. It has now ended.

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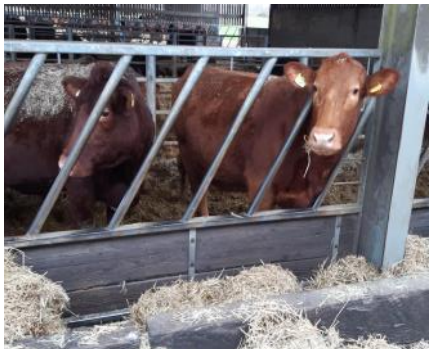
It is important to carry out disease screening at least annually to remain on top of the situation. As always, please contact us if you would like to know more.

Claire Rudd
Veterinary Surgeon

Autumn management tasks

With the days starting to get shorter and the weather feeling more autumnal, those of you with spring-calving suckler herds will be starting to think about weaning. This year, with the amount of grass still available and cows in relatively good body condition the timing of this is likely to be dictated more by weather and ground condition than the availability of forage and cows losing weight.



However, consideration should be given to weaning thin cows early, so they can maintain body condition through the winter and until calving next year, without the need to feed too much expensive conserved forage or, worse, concentrates with the risk of growing the calf, resulting in an increased number of difficult calvings in the spring.

Weaning methods can vary from farm to farm and is something we have talked about at previous beef suckler discussion groups. If you have always done the same thing every year – perhaps take a moment to think about whether you experience problems at weaning and if so, whether it might be worth trying something new.

Many other management tasks are often timed to coincide with weaning.

Pregnancy diagnosis will allow decisions to be made about the management of individual animals and care to be focussed on those that are going to give you a return next year. It will allow a decision to be made about the fate of empty animals before they have been kept overwinter eating expensive feed and using expensive bedding.

Older, fatter cows or those that have been empty in previous years will probably be sold for slaughter in the run up to Christmas, while trade is traditionally strong. Younger cows may be given a reprieve and kept round for another year but if this is the case it is important that this is an active decision rather than one that is made by accident!

Weaning and/or housing is also a good time to consider parasite control. Adult cows will probably not need worming, but weaned calves will probably benefit from treatment, ideally just before housing so that any lungworm burden is eliminated before the risk of pneumonia increases when they are put in sheds. **A worm egg count, carried out on youngstock pre-housing can help assess the level of risk and identify need for treatment**.

It is important to choose a product that will kill inhibited worm larvae as well as adult gut worms and lungworm to prevent type II Ostertagiasis in the spring. Using the correct pour-on product may also help to control ectoparasites, particularly mites although a pour-on permethrin will be necessary to control lice. **We have a number of parasite control products available in stock – please contact our dispensary to discuss your needs.**

On farms with a known liver fluke problem both adult cattle and calves will benefit from treatment with an appropriate flukicide. At this time of year the challenge from immature fluke can be high so it makes sense to chose a product that will kill both immature and adult stages of the parasite; effectively Triclabendazole. Even this, however, will not kill all fluke larvae down to a day old so although it will mean an extra handling it makes good sense to delay liver fluke treatment until a couple of weeks after your cattle have been housed. **Our vets and RAMAs in our dispensary are on hand to advise you of the appropriate products – please see opposite page for latest product prices.**

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Vaccination prior to weaning and housing to try to prevent pneumonia may also make sense, particularly to protect weaned calves against IBR in known endemically infected herds. This involves only a single vaccine at modest cost and the pay-back if a disease outbreak and deaths are avoided is enormous. **Please speak with one of our vets asap if you think your calves may be at risk.**

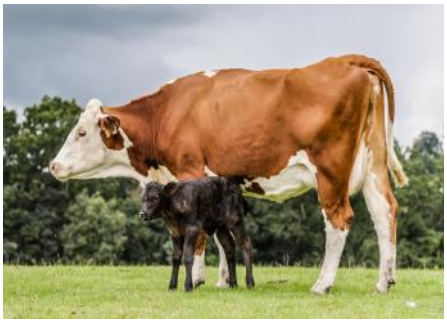
Keith Cutler
Veterinary Surgeon

Autumn calving reminders

We haven't forgotten those who are just starting to calve now. The weather has so far been kind and there is plenty of grass out there, despite quality starting to drop off. We hope autumn calving has started well. However, if you are experiencing problems such as abortions, still births or deformities, please do get in touch sooner, rather than later.

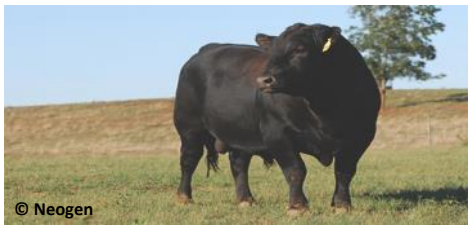
Early investigation of problems can often help to nip things in the bud before they escalate. Same goes for calf disease – if you are experiencing diarrhoea in your baby calves or they are slow to get up and suck please do give us a call. Getting an accurate diagnosis quickly can save weeks or even months of struggling with a problem that has got out of control.

Finally when you come to house your cows think about having a go at body condition scoring them – this information is extremely useful when it comes to formulating winter rations as well as to inform weaning decisions. With margins becoming ever tighter in the beef sector, it is important that we make full use of the information available to us to make the most cost-effective management decisions. If you are unsure how to carry out body condition scoring ask your vet for a demo.



There is also the opportunity to utilise our Vet Tech services for body condition scoring during routine handling.

Genomics in the beef sector – is this even a thing?



There has been some interesting discussion recently at the practice about the potential use of genomics as a breeding selection tool, not only in the dairy sector but also with regards to beef animals. We recently had a meeting with representatives from Neogen, about their product Igenity Beef®.

You may already have some experience of **genetics** – for example selecting replacements with the gene for being polled. **Genetics is the study of specific genes** (small sections of genetic material that code for certain traits) **that an animal has and the ability for those genes to be passed on to offspring** (also known as heritability).

Genomics however is the study of the whole genome – all the genetic material of an animal – both the genes themselves and other non-coding proteins within the genome (the complete set of genetic material of an animal). **Genomics looks at how all the genetic material interacts and works together to produce the potential for certain traits in offspring.**

Genomics tools such as Igenity® are a relatively new method of profiling replacement heifers and non-registered bulls to help you evaluate their genetic potential for maternal, performance and carcass traits. This makes it easy to review and focus on those traits making the biggest impact. Estimated breed values or EBV's, something many of you will be familiar with when it comes to bulls, are a profiling system based on physical traits that have been measured in previous generations of animals from the same sire. This is only possible if the pedigree of a bull is known and there is a large data set of information about his progeny. **Genomics tools such as Igenity® are based on identifying the presence of genetic potential** for certain attributes in individuals, by looking for markers in the genetic material of the individual that have been associated with a particular physical trait. i.e. the pedigree of the animal does not need to be known and indeed this tool can be used on cross bred animals as well as pedigree animals.

Igenity® profiles allow you to rank cattle on 16 traits that impact productivity, helping commercial producers select replacement heifers based on genetic merit. Igenity® ranks cattle using simple 1 –10 scores for key traits which are indexed into a maternal, production or terminal profiles and can be adapted for a farm specific index. Farmers can use these scores on heifers to pursue certain desirable traits in their herd. If you are in the position of having more replacements than you need the information can be used to select the animals to keep or sell.

Another useful way information can be used is to confirm the parentage of calves.

Neogen are very keen to talk to our farmers about their beef products, which are already being used by a number of large producers in America. **We hope to run a meeting on this topic in the near future and hear your ideas about how you think the information can be used on your farm.** We are looking for a few beef suckler farmers who rear their own replacements, to make use of some sponsorship from Neogen to look into the genetic potential of heifer replacements. If you are interested in learning more or potentially being involved please contact myself.

TEAM BEEF are keen to help you with all aspects of herd health and production including being involved in discussions around heifer selection, as we see this as having a critical role in moving herd productivity forwards. Tools such as Igenity® beef, as well as utilising our services at Synergy Farm Health, including heifer weighing, condition scoring, pelvic measurement, and consultancy services, can be used to help you make informed heifer selection choices.

Louise Silk
Veterinary Surgeon

Forage analysis reminder

A little reminder, now is the time to have your winter forage analysed to assess energy and protein content, as well as trace elements. This information can be used to help formulate a ration for overwintering cows and is particularly useful in the run up to spring calving.

We can run forage analyses at the practice starting from around £20 or many feed companies will run these analyses for free for current customers. All you need is a large sandwich bag full of forage. Remember also that if you have multiple different forages of varying quality, it is worth getting several analyses done, to ensure we have a good overall picture of the forage quality available on the farm.

Send the analysis to your regular vet who will be happy to look at it for you.

**** NEW PRODUCT LAUNCH ****

SOLANTEL POUR ON FOR CATTLE

A Closantel based Flukicide treatment, treating life stages from 7 weeks to adult fluke. **Available in 1L at £105, 2.5L at £195 and 5L at £365.** Meat withhold – 63 days.

Dispensary Seasonal Offers

ENOVEX POUR ON
2.5L £32

ENDOFLUKE DRENCH
2.5L £55
5L £84

EPRIZERO POUR ON
1L £74
2.5L £135
5L £186

FASINEX 240 DRENCH
0.8L £80
2.2L £162
5L £295

*Prices correct on printing 28/09/21. Offers end 31/10/21. All prices ex VAT. For a full list of promotions, please call Dispensary on **01935 83682.**

We have a TRODAX INJECTION EQUIVALENT available, sourced under an import licence. Please speak to your vet or our RAMAs for details.

News from the rounds

I have seen a few cases of laryngeal chondritis in suckler calves this year and thought it would be useful to highlight the symptoms prior to pneumonia season. This disease generally occurs sporadically in younger calves around 2-6 months old and can initially be similar in appearance to pneumonia with a cough and increased breathing rate. However as the tissues around the larynx in the throat become infected and inflamed the airway is becomes progressively narrowed resulting in severe difficulty breathing – calves will be open-mouthed breathing with their head and neck extended. In more advanced cases the narrowing results in significant noise especially when breathing in – not unlike really loud snoring – which may be heard as soon as you go into the shed.

Sometimes the disease occurs following calf diphtheria and there will be a particularly unpleasant smell as the membranes at the back of the throat die off and there may be excessive salivation and swallowing indicating discomfort. The disease can be fatal and these animals need to be seen by a vet as soon as possible for assessment to determine the cause and instigate treatment. If treatment is started early then it is likely to be successful. In a few cases we may need to perform a tracheostomy (create a breathing hole through the neck below the larynx) to allow the calf to bypass the larynx whilst it recovers.

Clare Eames
Veterinary Surgeon

Making use of on-farm information– part 1

Stock keeping produces a lot of information which, if looked at carefully, can be extremely useful. Even basic records, which are a statutory requirement, can tell you a lot about your herd's performance and guide your decision making for the future.

Focus on breeding animal performance - all of the following data points can be obtained from BCMS records and /or calving and mortality records.

Data	Target	Relevance/ Importance	Comments
Cows and heifers put to bull	n/a	Starting point	Important to use this figure as honest starting point.
Barren Cows	<5%	Low barren rate = better herd productivity	Get cows PDed from 6 weeks after bulls come out and have a conversation with your vet about fertility.
Calving period	<12 weeks	Short calving period = tightly batched calves, easier management, reduced risk of disease, even calf groups at weaning and sale	Decide on defined service period and ensure bulls removed at pre-determined time.
Calves born in first 3 weeks	>65%	Cows that calve in the first cycle = longer to recover before going to the bull again, advantages of early born calves	A poor figure here will flag the need to look into fertility in more depth.
Calf mortality during pregnancy	<2%	More calves alive / lower mortality = better herd productivity	Does this link to assisted calvings, calving management, disease or cow BCS in your herd?
Calf mortality birth - weaning	<3%		
Assisted calvings	<5%	Lower number of assisted calving = lower labour, reduced vet med costs, higher calves born alive	Is this linked to genetics or nutrition and body condition in your herd? How do heifers and cows compare?
Calves weaned	>94%	More weaned calves = higher herd productivity	Is this flagging up issues with calf diseases and parasites in youngstock?

The most common reasons for not analysing information are the belief that it won't be useful, the assumption that your information is incomplete or hard to find and thinking that data analysis is too time consuming or complex. Hopefully the table above shows that all the information you need is likely to be readily available, easy to process and is valuable when looking to increase herd productivity and profitability.

We can look at data within a season as well as trends over a number of years, all of which help to build a picture of herd performance and highlight areas for improvement.

Ask your vet who will be delighted to help with data analysis.

Please note XL Vets has just launched a countrywide beef benchmarking program – we are looking to recruit farmers from across the UK to contribute some of our production data for analysis and then run some discussion group meetings. If you would like to be involved please speak to a member of TEAM BEEF.

Tom Warboys
Veterinary Surgeon