

South West Healthy Livestock Initiative: Beef Meeting

Date: 10.02.09

Agenda point 1

Give an example of a health and welfare issue on your farm and how you overcame that problem and where did you go for advice- who was most influential and who came up with practical solutions?

Problem 1: BVD and mucosal disease

I bought in a bunch of heifers from what I thought was a clean herd and picked up BVD. I lost about 3 animals.

Problem solving: Vet took blood samples to find out what the problem was. I vaccinate for BVD now.

Problem 2: Enzootic abortion (ewes)

10-12% of my ewes were aborting in the first 2 years. This was the biggest loss.

Problem solving: 5th year vet students from the University of Bristol came to my farm and took blood samples from 200-300 sheep. The university did the blood tests for free but the students suggested impractical advice, for example to cull anything that aborts. The university were very useful in finding out what the problem was and then I spoke to vaccine manufacturers. Now I vaccinate every ewe lamb.

General discussion on abortion...

Do you have a problem with toxoplasma abortion? No I only have enzootic.

If you only get one type of abortion that's ok because you can easily vaccinate against it once you know what it is. If you get both types you have to spend a lot of money on vaccines for every animal when it may not be necessary to do so.

Problem 3:

- Worms
- Lack of information for organic farmers

I run an organic farm so we can't do regular dosing with wormers. Need clean grazing to avoid getting worms.

Problem solving: We try to graze sheep after cattle and vice-versa. It is too expensive to always get tests done through the vet so I bought my own pack to test and monitor faecal samples for worms. The kit FECPAK costs several hundred pounds so I split the cost with a neighbouring farmer and we share it. I found out about FECPAK through the vet and they had it on display at a soil association meeting. FECPAK has helped the problem.

When it started I had good clean stock

Problem 4: Recently started up. When we started the farm we tried to get good stock in. Took part in a herd health care scheme. Went to Devon sales and bought a new load of calves to increase the herd size. When tested on the farm it was found that they were infected with BVD and leptospirosis.

Problem solving: Went to the vet for advice and initial blood testing. We later contacted Biobest a privately owned virology lab in Scotland. They take regular samples now to test for IBR and BVD. Biobest were the best source of advice for us. They were keen to get it right. We also isolate our show animals now.

Problem 5:

- TB- no answer to it
- Fluke

Problem solving: I've never used a flukicide on my beef cattle before and it only crossed my mind for the first time this summer due to the wet weather. I have used it on my dry dairy cattle in the past, but I have started getting beef carcasses back with fluke. I discussed the problem with my vet and they didn't give great advice. The important thing is getting impartial advice. I wouldn't buy a wormer through my vet, although certain drugs are cheaper than Mole Valley.

I went to the flukicide merchant for advice but they are a general saleperson so it's difficult to trust them. They don't have any practical experience of the products they are trying to sell you. They helped me put a program together, although they do have a biased opinion.

I used a flukicide on the last lot but I'm not sure if that's worked yet. I used it instead of a wormer.

General discussion about fluke...

People are saying they are getting more and more fluke now. It may be due to two consecutive wet summers.

Problem 6:

- Calf by relation
- BVD and leptospirosis

Problem solving: Had an elite health status flock but we tested and found BVD and leptospirosis. We consulted with the vet and they took samples. Vet was the only person I needed to consult.

Problem 7:

- Pneumonia
- Weight loss due to stress

We gave up dairy and went into beef farming. We kept the same housing which was fine for dairy but too intensive for beef. The problem was with ventilation.

Problem solving: Went to the vet first. Suggested vaccinating and sorting ventilation problem. They are all vaccinated now as calves before they come onto the rearing unit. We still get the odd one but not as bad. We also went to our local builder who had done bits on other farms so had knowledge of what needed to be done. Bit by bit we opened up the building to get the ventilation right. We took off some roof sheets and side cladding. You could tell how strong the ammonia was when we lifted the roof. We also used some information from EBLEX about buildings.

We also got involved with a project at Bristol University looking at handling and whether it affects DFD meat. It can vary from 6-20 %. Stress also causes weight loss. We take them into Langford to reduce the transport time. The university are very helpful.

Problem 8: Orf

It was really bad when lambing. We lost a lot of lambs and ewes. Not much you can do.

Problem solving: Went to the vet and they said you won't get it next year. They didn't push us to vaccinate but when we had it the 2nd year running I thought I'd better start. Now we inject every lamb with Scabivax. It's fine now, not sure if we need to continue vaccinating but I'm afraid not to.

I've heard about tubby blocks from Brinicombe (mineral company). I haven't taken up their advice but have heard about it.

We also had some problems with BVD, IBR and fluke. We used to use Trojax but found it doesn't kill eggs. Now we drench with Fasinex which is less hassle and more effective.

Agenda point 2 and 3

Rate the sources of ideas, information and advice for: value for money, quality of advice and quality of results

	Value for money	Quality of advice	Results
Vet	3/5	4/5	3.5/5 (Depends if the animal lives or dies)
Agricultural merchants	4/5	2/5	3/5
Laboratory	4/5	4/5	4/5
EBLEX	4/5	4/5	4/5
Kingshay (Dairy)	4/5 (Lacking this for the beef sector)	4/5	4/5

Farmers Weekly/ Guardian	4/5	3/5 (Depends what you make of it. Can be biased but acts as a good basis of information)	3/5
Websites	5/5	2/5 (Up and coming)	3/5
Consultants e.g. ADAS	2/5	4/5	3/5
Nutritionist	3/5 (depends on the individual)	3/5	3/5
Training courses e.g. handling	5/5 (lacking in training courses)	5/5	5/5
Other farmers	5/5	4/5	4/5
Specialist beef events	5/5 (provides a lot of information in a small place)	5/5	5/5
Vet school	4/5	4/5	4/5 (If it solves the problem)

General discussions whilst ranking sources of information...

Training courses e.g. handling

- Temple Grandin would run good training courses but so expensive to get her over here.
- Miriam Parker who does similar work in UK would also be useful for running courses.
- Went on a useful handling course at Rackham Farms in Norfolk.
- Cattle handling is so important for getting animals trimmed up for slaughter especially now we have fewer workers on farms.
- Concrete circular pens are good but expensive.
- There's not currently much training available for beef farmers but it is badly needed.
- I've been on a one day course on safety when showing cattle.
- Kingfisher vets run the odd day e.g. foot trimming.
- Meat South West/ EBLEX do training days.
- Sent my staff up to the vets for a staff training day.

Vet

- Vet is the first port of call for most things.
- Sometimes the advice is theoretical but not very practical.
- The textbook answer is not always right.
- Veterinary advice is good if you have small numbers of animals but not always practical (economic) for large herds.
- If you haven't got a problem you don't want to go and look for things.

Agricultural Merchants

- Don't give very valid advice as they're trying to sell you products.
- Biased.

Media

- Many of us don't use computers
- I went on the web to get information about ringworm
- Wouldn't often use the web but when I do it's good value for money
- Websites can give basic information which you may not act on but it gives you a background to discuss further
- Most things you can find out about on the internet. Just because we are not regular users it doesn't mean it's not there. We would print things off that we find interesting and be more likely to have a read and take it in. It helps you retain the information more than when you speak to someone.
- If you have a problem it's important to get a wealth of information. Websites do help to get more information and understand problems.

Laboratory

- By the time you use the lab it is too late.
- Biobest provides a different service as they do tests more regularly. Everyone else sends post-mortems but I send live samples.
- What other service do we have other than the lab?

EBLEX

- Sponsor sheep and beef discussion group meetings (not many people go).
- Give impartial advice.
- Have a lot of information on footrot.

Kingshay (Dairy)

- Used to belong to Kingshay even though I've never milked.
- Unbiased.
- Rate Kingshay highly for value for money.

Other Farmers

- Someone else may have been in the same boat as you.

Nutritionists

- If the nutritionist gets it right they are worth the money if they get it wrong they are not.
- I use Mole Valley nutritionists to set up the ration then implement changes through consultation with the vet.
- Mole Valley are a good company and know what our target weight is.

Agenda point 6

Where could the money be most usefully spent within the beef sector?

- Training
 - Getting people to use high EBV bulls. More efficient animals.
 - Handling- course run by a respected teacher e.g. Temple Grandin
 - Quality teaching
 - Some vets are better than others for training
 - Health (problems that can arise)
 - Training on prevention of problems
 - Electronic tagging training (over the next 12 months, if we can't stop it!)

- Regional disease eradication e.g. BVD

- Providing a source of unbiased information
e.g. An equivalent of Kingshay for the beef sector

- Research
 - Setting up a research farm like Liscombe
 - Feed
 - Efficiency
 - Biofuel bioproducts
 - Wholecrops, maize, silage etc

- Education
 - About breeding to improve efficiency
 - Putting research into practice
 - Farm walks are a good way of educating other farmers. Need to see an average farm to fuel discussions, it's no good seeing a perfect farm. Would be good to see them with a vet so that you can properly discuss the issues that may be raised.
 - Trading standards need to be educated on farm problems. They need to understand more about the general day-to-day running of a farm. Trading standards (and all stakeholders) should have as much education as farmers.

General discussion on discussion groups...

Already have some discussion groups set up which are good. People don't necessarily use them but they should. Hobby farmers often ruin it for others as they ask basic questions. Need to go to discussion groups with other farmers with equivalent businesses.

Having small groups for discussions is valuable. Having large groups of people doesn't work. Critical discussions are also good, for example involving farm walks.

