WORKING TOGETHER FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE

AUTUMN EDITION 2014

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Inside this issue: Inside this issue:

Displaced Abomasum

A new technique with faster recovery rates for resolving a displaced abomasum.

CALF PNEUMONIA

A special feature explaining strategies to prevent pneumonia in <u>calves.</u>



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CONTENTS

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THE EDITOR

Welcome to the 'Autumn' issue of Livestock Matters

With the recent turn in the weather we now focus our attention to preparation for housing for cattle and sheep husbandry through the Autumn and Winter months towards lambing.

In this issue we tackle pneumonia; looking at management changes that can be made to prevent disease rather than relying on vaccination alone. We also take a look at a dairy club set up by one XLVets practice, Drove Veterinary Hospital, where farmers come together to monitor and review herd performance, using specific key performance indicators and then how they share experiences to look at how each has made improvements over time. There's also a Johne's monitoring scheme that farmers can use to help develop a disease management plan to help control Johne's infection within the herd.

With sheep now in-lamb our attention turns to reducing losses due to abortion. We look at the common causes of abortion in

sheep and how these diseases can be kept out of the flock.

We also have a round-up from the recent events XLVets has attended and for those of you coming along to AgriScot please do come and visit the XLVets stand.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Joanne Sharpe XLVets



CONTENTS

ANIMAL HEALTH

- 05 Some practical advice on spotting a displaced abomasum: Sotirios Karvountzis, Shepton Veterinary Group explains a new technique to resolve the issue of displaced abomasum, resulting in faster recovery rates.
- 08 Could you be making more of your milk records? And making more money? Kate Brodie, Drove Veterinary Hospital, reports on the importance of vet practices analysing and using milk recording data for the benefit of their clients to help improve production, efficiency and herd profitability.
- 17 Ovine abortion: A report on the most common causes of abortion in sheep.

INDUSTRY FEATURE

15 NEW XLVets farm animal post mortem service.

We explain how farmers that have their fallen stock collected by Redferns of Flagg, and Brassington's of Thorncliffe have been benefiting from the new XLVets post mortem service being offered.

21 Student Diaries:

Our third reports from veterinary students Alice McLeish and Antonia Matthews.

FARMSKILLS TRAINING

19 FarmSkills: Milking routines: The economics of getting it right.

Strategies to prevent pneumonia in calves:

We have reports from two XLVets practices on how attention to management, housing, and a knowledge of which disease pathogens are present on farm can help prevent pneumonia in calves.



Livestock 2014 Award-winning success at Livestock 2014

This year's Livestock 2014 event at Birmingham's NEC got off to a great start with our new-style stand attracting hundreds of visitors, and we picked up a rather special award along the way.

With a number of new campaigns and initiatives launched on the stand, this year's event was a busy one for the team, attracting much interest from visitors. The XLVets 'Make Your Farm Your Fortress' and 'BVD Free' campaigns featured heavily, encouraging farmers to think practically about biosecurity risks on farm and the measures that can be taken to keep disease, and in particular BVD, out of their stock.

This year's event also saw the launch of the FarmSkills Farmer Portal, a system allowing farmers to log their training record and certificates, get recommendations for future training and development in their area and link into wider national XLVet campaigns such as the BVD Free initiative.



RABDF President, Professor David Leaver presents Joanne Sharpe, XLVets and Stuart Gough, Calweton Vets with the runner-up certificate for the Prince Philip Award.



Also impressed with our stand were the judges for this year's RABDF Prince Philip Award which recognises the most practical, relevant and well-presented technical exhibit at the Livestock Event each year. The judges interviewed the XLVets team on the stand and on announcing them as runner-up they noted that: 'XLVets have taken an industry wide problem in BVD and tackled it head on to find a practical solution.' A fantastic achievement and well done to all the XLVets members involved, particularly Stuart Gough, Calweton Vets and Dan Humphries, Lambert, Leonard & May.









Lameness in the dairy herd farm walk



David Mulligan Parklands Veterinary Group

Over 70 farmers turned up to the farm near Stewartstown, Co Tyrone, to listen to Parklands vets explain the different issues associated with lameness in the dairy herd.

Vet Philip Abernethy opened the farm walk explaining why Parklands organised the walk and some of the key messages. He said: 'The intention is to prevent rather than cure. We need to look at lameness in the herd a bit like we look at mastitis. For example, if you have digital dermatitis in your herd, all you can do is control it - you won't get rid of it. The disease is spread by new and chronic cases and you have to talk about control rather than eradication.'

Philip explained that when you lift a cow's foot you are too late because the disease, at that stage, is causing the cow discomfort. He suggested you need a lameness plan for your herd from the calf stage right up to the milking cow stage. When cows are indoors all year round on slats and concrete, lameness can be a big issue, as the Parklands survey shows.

The six practical demonstration areas; mobility scoring, practical foot bathing, digital dermatitis, cattle accommodation, foot trimming and pedometers gave farmers the opportunity to listen to some of the latest thoughts from vets on tackling lameness on-farm.



Craig McAlister, right, with farm clients 📕



NSA Sheep Event

This year, the NSA Sheep Event returned to Malvern and the XLVets stand welcomed visitors from far and wide onto the stand with the promise of winning one of the now well-known green buckets by taking one of several educational tasks on offer.

With biosecurity a focus, the 'Make your farm your fortress' campaign demonstrated



the importance of biosecurity measures to keep disease off farm and out of flocks. Farmers gained practical advice from the many XLVets vets on the stand throughout the day. A huge thanks to all those who were involved.





Find out the latest news and what XLVets members are up to by following us on Twitter®, **@XLVets.**

DISPLACED ABOMASUM





XLVets practice

Shepton Veterinary Group



SOTIRIOS KARVOUNTZIS, SHEPTON VETERINARY GROUP

Some practical advice on spotting a displaced abomasum (DA)

A new technique to resolve the issue

A displaced abomasum in a freshly calved cow is costly to put right, and it takes time for milk yields to return to normal. Where cases do occur, the sooner they are treated the better. XLVets' Sotirios Karvountzis of Shepton Vets in Somerset uses an endoscopic technique to treat DA (displaced abomasum) cases, resulting in faster recovery rates than traditional methods.



Anatomy of a DA

The rumen is the first of a cow's stomachs, followed by the reticulum, then the omasum. The abomasum is the fourth stomach, and is equivalent in its function to a human's. The first three stomachs are fixed or weighted down. But the abomasum is kept in place towards the bottom of a cow's abdominal cavity only by gravity and the rumen above it.

An abomasum can become displaced when 1) the cow has not been eating, e.g. after a difficult calving, and the rumen becomes empty and loose, and/or 2) when rumen fermentation is poor, and a lot of gas is produced. This latter effect can occur when cows are turned out to grass, as their diet will change to one which will produce more gas once digested. When a lot of gas, as well as fluid, enters this fourth stomach, it makes the abomasum more buoyant, and as the rumen no longer fully blocks its path, it causes it to rise and displace.

Due to the natural physical contractions of the abomasum (peristalsis), it is more likely to dislodge to the left than the right, hence the term LDA, although RDAs do occur in approximately 20% of cases.

For those looking after the herd, the first outward sign of a DA is that a cow stops eating and milk yield drops. The only way to resolve the situation is by veterinary intervention to physically release the gas and re-site the abomasum.

Left displaced abomasum (LDA)



A - abomasum in early stages of displacement



B - further displacement, but may not be diagnosed by sloshing or pinging



C - full displacement, detectable by sloshing and pinging

Preventing DAs

'The two biggest risk periods for a DA are at turnout - because of the change in diet and in the first eight weeks of calving," explains Sotirios.

'Immediately after calving, cows will have a poorer appetite as they recover from giving birth. And over the following days, the cow will be in a state of negative energy balance as she produces more milk than she can consume energy to support.

'A prolonged lack of energy can lead the cow to enter a state of ketosis in which she will mobilise her body fat to supply the glucose she lacks. Ketones are produced as a side-product of the process and these in turn will reduce the mobility of the digestive tract. The result: rumen 'stasis' occurs and upsets the flow of digestive fluids. This in turn leads to the production of more gas.

'This makes nutrition and feeding in the transition period key to preventing LDAs. The milking cow diet needs to be introduced slowly into the non-milking cow.

'Another factor is the cow herself: those with a large abdominal cavity are more predisposed to the phenomenon, e.g. those which have carried a large calf, twins, or breeds which are of a large build, particularly of deep abdomen."

On-farm diagnosis

'In around 10% of cases, the displacement of the abomasum is self-correcting,' explains Sotirios, 'But farmers shouldn't wait, the sooner it's resolved the better.

'It's possible to make some diagnosis on-farm before calling the vet out, using two techniques.

'The conventional approach is to flick with finger and thumb between the ribs where the gassy abomasum would have risen to, and listen for a 'ping'. It's useful to have a stethoscope to do this.

'Another technique is 'ballottement' or more colloquially, sloshing. This involves pushing a fist in on the cow's lower flank - if a sloshing sound is heard then this indicates there's a lot of gas.

These techniques can help identify if the abomasum has moved, but if the

displacement is only in the early stages then it's hard to tell and the cow's behaviour - her apparent lack of appetite - is the main indicator



Farmer Phil Langley 'pings' a suspected LDA case

Treatment options

There are several veterinary procedures to remedy DAs. The most common is to perform a laparotomy in which an incision (approximately 30cm long) is made into the abdominal space. A very small puncture can then be made in the abomasum to release the gas, and the organ can be tied back into position.

For the past four years, Sotirios has been using a new technique in which the operation is performed using endoscopy, or 'key-hole surgery'. It requires only two small incisions of around 1 cm diameter each to be made. One is the 'optical portal' for the endoscope with its camera on the end, whilst the other is the 'working portal' into which a hollow cannula is placed which has a trocar inside to create the puncture. After the gas is released, the abomasum is secured back into

position, using a clever set-up of needles and suturing via the working portal.

Sotirios explains: 'The small size of the two portals means they don't require stitching up after surgery as they will just close up naturally. This technique is unobtrusive and there's minimal bacterial risk. In most cases, antibiotics aren't needed and there's no milk withhold period to observe. So although the operation takes longer than the 'toggle method' and costs more to do, cow recovery is better, and there's less milk lost from the bulk tank.

'Using the endoscope I can fully visualise the situation inside the abdominal cavity. So it can be used for exploratory purposes and has proven useful in spotting hidden problems such as ulcers, or perforated guts, and even some reproductive problems.



Beware over-conditioned cows

At Barrow Vale Farm in Farmborough, near Bath, dairy farmer Philip Langley milks 180 cows, averaging yields of around 9,800 litres/cow. Cows go out to graze in the day during summer. It is an all-year round calving herd and is managed as one group.



Sotirios says: 'DAs are not a major problem here, as there is good transition cow management. We meet together with Phil's nutritionist every few months to discuss herd nutrition and health matters.

'The few cases that do occur tend to be in the over-conditioned cows. This is a common problem on farms which don't have the facilities to manage the high and low yielding cows separately. In late lactation, some cows can become fat as they are eating more than they need to support milk production.

'When this happens, the cow's metabolism tells her she doesn't need to eat, and this leads to a looser rumen and more space for an abomasum to displace.

'Fat cows are also prone to difficult calvings, and afterwards can take longer to recover their appetite. This further creates the conditions in which a DA is more likely to occur."

Philip explains: 'I always keep an eye out for any signs of a DA after cows have calved. If I notice a cow's yield has dropped or she's not eating then I'll put her into a crush and examine her.'

Philip has his own stethoscope and uses this to listen for the tell-tale 'ping' of a DA. He will also 'slosh' her with his fist.

'Sotirios has been using the endoscopic technique to sort out the DA cases that we've had. I've been impressed with the speed of recovery, cows can be back out grazing in the field in 12 hours."



Farmer Phil Langley



Checking over the dry cows



Taking action on DAs

Sotirios explains: 'To a large extent, DAs can be prevented with attention to transition cow management. So on some farms, a DA case is exceptionally rare. The aim is always to have none, but a tolerable level would be one of less than 3% per year. If it's higher, then farmers should be concerned.

'The solution will almost always be both dietary and management. So it's important to discuss the issue together with both the vet and the nutritionist. A team approach is best,' he advises.



Phil Langley and Sotirios





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XLVets Practice

Drove Veterinary Hospital



KATE BRODIE, DROVE VETERINARY HOSPITAL

Could you be making more of your milk records? And making more money?

Around 65% of UK dairy herds are milk-recorded. The data produced is not only useful in monitoring production and milk quality, but can also be used to focus discussion on a range of herd health issues; fertility, mastitis, poor nutrition. Armed with a good knowledge of what is happening in the herd, vets, farmers and other technical advisers can tailor plans for tackling the key issues on each farm, and ultimately improve production, efficiency and herd profitability.

Dairy Early Warning (DEW) Club

There are a variety of ways in which different vet practices analyse and use milk recording data for the benefit of their clients.

At Drove Veterinary Hospital in Wiltshire, dairy farmers can sign up to the DEW (Dairy Early Warning) Club and receive a very comprehensive monthly report which runs to eight pages of graphs and figures. These provide information to help steer activities in three key areas; to reduce cell counts, to reduce the number of mastitis cases occurring per year, and to improve fertility by better heat detection, as measured by the inter-service interval.

The DEW report was devised by veterinary consultant Peter May - who is affiliated to the Drove practice - in collaboration with NMR. The report compares a herd's performance against that of 500 NMR-milk recorded herds; these are a carefully selected cross-section and include the 'best' and 'worst' of herds, so giving a true comparison against herds nationally. The DEW report can be generated using the data from whichever milk recording service is employed on the farm.

Peter May explains: 'The DEW report is produced at the practice, and then taken onto the farm by the vet, where it is used as a basis for discussion with the farmer, and at times, also the nutritionist - for a team approach.'

Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)

The first page of the DEW report gives an overview of the herd on 29 selected aspects of herd performance; these are the KPIs (key performance indicators). A scale is used to show both the 12-month and 3-month rolling average for each KPI, with an arrow indicating the change over time and the position in comparison with the 500 NMR herds. Further graphs follow which provide more specific information on factors which influence the specific KPIs. For instance, looking at the protein intercept, fat:protein ratio and protein yields in early lactation is helpful in identifying energy issues that may impact on fertility - so the report provides a nutritional early warning. Investigations into controlling mastitis are aided by graphs showing types of infection, and high cell count cows are identified. Mobility scores, where recorded, can also be shown.

Peter explains: 'The graphs in the report flag up health issues which the farm vet can then discuss and investigate with their client.'

Additionally, members of the DEVV Club are invited to quarterly meetings which focus on one of the KPIs, and look at how to improve it. Each member's herd is also benchmarked against the rest of the Club with each farm assigned a codename (that of a rugby club!) to protect anonymity. These meetings are followed by visits to members' farms to see how they have improved the specific KPI, and often include talks given by independent experts.

The Club is proving successful in helping farmers to improve herd health. 'Two years ago when the Club first started, 58% of our members had herds with cell counts which put them in the worst half of herds nationally,' explains Peter. 'But now, through working with their vets, and aided by the ability to measure mastitis and check success of any changes made, this has reduced to 36%. As a group of herds, they have gone from being worse than the national average, to being markedly better, in just two years.'

He adds: 'For farms which are already paying for a milk recording service, the DEW Club is only another £10 per month. So it's a small cost for a report which can prove invaluable in highlighting where improvements in fertility and mastitis control are needed, and tracking the progress which ultimately will lead to lower vet bills and/or better herd performance.'

Improving performance

At North Farm near Swindon, Nick Clarke and his wife Jo and son Sam signed their 100-cow dairy herd up to the DEW Club about 18 months ago.

Significant improvements to herd performance have already been seen and their vet, Kate Brodie is keen to progress more.

The Clarke family's ethos is very much to enjoy everything they do - which includes keeping some of the family lines in their pedigree herd going, showing cattle at local events, and not pushing cows 'too hard'.

Cows are calved down all year round, and the average yield is 7,000 litres/cow from a maize and grass-based ration, with concentrate fed to yield in the parlour. Cases of metabolic disorders are few.

For the past four years, Nick has been using sexed semen. He explains: 'There are certain family lines we are keen to continue and so most heifers will be put to sexed semen to ensure we get at least one heifer replacement from them.'

However the practice of running a bull with the cows, not establishing whether cows were pregnant until six months post-calving, plus giving 'favourite' cows plenty of chances to conceive, has meant their calving index had extended to a long 439 days.

Prior to signing up to the DEW Club, the Clarkes only used to see their vet, Kate Brodie of Drove Veterinary Hospital for TB testing or fire-brigade work'. But now, Kate makes a monthly visit to carry out fertility checks and also discuss and improve other aspects of herd health.



Hereford sweeper bull

Kate explains: 'Previously cows were only PDed at drying off, but now I'm examining them at 42 days post-calving and we can rectify any fertility problems straight away. With these regular visits, we can improve the proportion of cows served after 80 days and cows pregnant by 100 days. Whilst performance for these KPIs has yet to reach target, already improvements are being seen.' See Figure 1.



The Clarke Family, Left, Jo, centre, Nick, right is son Sam

Figure 1: Improvements in KPIs seen after just 9 months at North Farm

	17 Sept 2013	10 June 2014	Target +/- Range
% cows served 80 days after calving	38	43	63 +/- 27
% cows pregnant 100 days after calving	27	32	35 +/- 18
Calving to 1st service interval (days)	117	98	80 +/- 36
Calving interval (days)	434	423	404 +/- 32
% cows eligible for service served	21	30	43 +/- 22
Milk/cow/year (kg)	5,750	6,653	9,026 +/- 1,869
Average SCC ('000 cells/ml)	240	228	162 +/- 77
% SCC greater than 200,000 cells/ml	24	22	18 +/- 9
% SCC greater than 500,000 cells/ml	8	9	7 +/- 4
Clinical mastitis: cases/100cows/year	0*	23	16 +/- 38





MILKING RECORDS

'The time from calving to first service has reduced by more than two weeks, and the calving interval has tightened up too.

The target calving index according to the DEW report is 404 days - but we won't be able to achieve that here due to the breeding policy on some of the pedigree lines. Besides, that's not the aim on this farm. However, there is still scope to improve efficiency.

'Having a tighter calving pattern increases overall herd annual milk yield - and yields have risen nearly 1,000 litres/cow/year, simply due to more cows being back in production more quickly.'

Many members of the DEW Club are using the charts on mastitis to help guide decisions on control. Kate says: 'At North Farm, the record-keeping of mastitis treatments were not very accurate at the start, but this has now improved, and we can now track progress.

The Clarkes are looking to reduce the overall cell count and also the high individual cell count cows using the DairyCo mastitis plan.

Nick admits to hanging onto some of the older cows which had high cell counts, because of their good breeding lines. Kate adds: 'I understand the reasons for this, but there has to come a point when hard decisions are made. So when we could see a good number of replacement heifers coming through, the cows had to go.'

Kate explains: 'Over the past 18 months we have made some improvements across all the KPIs. And now that I've got to know more about the farming system here, and the family's goals, we can be more targeted, going forward.

'There is certainly scope to further improve fertility. Changes can be made slowly without putting cows under stress. For instance, I'd like to see Nick using more AI, rather than the bull. 'The DEW report also showed that milk protein levels were low at both ends of the grazing season, a reflection of cows' low energy levels. So maize silage is being buffer-fed at grass this autumn to boost energy status. With a better ration, cows will be more nutritionally stable and this should help AI success rate.'

Nick adds: 'We now have quarterly bulk tank testing for IBR, leptospirosis and BVD. We are never going to be a closed herd because we take animals to shows, and buy-in pedigree replacements. But the herd is fortunate to be naïve, and Kate has set up a protocol to help keep infectious diseases at bay.'

'Kate knows our cows and our system well now. And it's good to be able to have a one-to-one with her and discuss all sorts of herd matters.

Joining the DEW Club has enabled us to get to grips with new technology and new ways of thinking, and we've adopted some new practices for our own herd. The data in the DEW report helps us to see the bigger picture, and through the meetings and farm visits, we are learning a lot, in an informal way.'



Light and airy buildings



A pedigree Belted Galloway calf - a bit of a sideline for the Clarkes!

Eradicating Johne's disease

Another element of the Drove's DEW Club is the option to sign up for Johne's disease monitoring and to have a management plan drawn up by the farm's vet so that, over time, the infection in the herd can be controlled.

Kate explains: 'By the time a cow has developed the clinical wasting signs of Johne's disease, it's too late to do anything other than cull her. These clinical cases are the tip of the iceberg - because there will be more animals in the herd that will be going on to develop it.

'And whilst the wasting seen in adult life is the classic sign, the 'big deal' is that Johne's disease suppresses an animal's immunity. So, infected animals are more likely to develop mastitis and lameness, for instance.'

To identify cows with Johnes' disease, individual milk samples can be tested quarterly, as part of the milk recording service.

Kate explains: 'Johne's is primarily spread to young calves by the faecal-oral route. There is also some transfer of infection through the mother's colostrum, and possibly even to the foetus in the womb.

'So all cows which test positive need to be kept separate around calving time, and calves 'snatched' on birth to prevent them drinking their dam's colostrum.'

'And when they come to be served, they are put to a beef breed and not used for heifer replacements.

'All Johne's-positive cows are added onto the cull list, although they may not be culled immediately. Due to the immunosuppressive effects of the disease, they are often already near the top of the cull list for other reasons.'

Kate adds: 'By reviewing the results of the quarterly milk tests, cows newly showing signs of infection can be identified. Together with the management plan, this will ensure that the negative impact of Johne's disease on herd health is brought under control.



Veterinary surgeon	Vikki Wyse
XLVets practice	Prostock Vets



VIKKI WYSE, PROSTOCK VETS COLIN LINDSAY, CAPONTREE VETERINARY CENTRE

Strategies to prevent pneumonia in calves

When it comes to pneumonia and respiratory disease, prevention is always better than cure.

Not only does it cost time and money to treat sick calves, but profitability is compromised as these animals will never regain their full performance potential.

But there's a lot more to preventing pneumonia than simply reaching for a bottle of vaccine. Attention to management, housing, and a knowledge of which disease pathogens are present on the farm are also required, to ensure maximum success. In some cases, further veterinary input may be needed as the right bottle of vaccine may not currently exist.

Straightforward solutions

For Carmarthenshire farmer Huw Davies, the route to stopping pneumonia cases has been straightforward.

Huw buys in around 70 dairy cross-bred calves through the year and finishes them at Pengelli Fawr, near Newcastle Emlyn.

Calves tend to be around four weeks of age. On arrival they are penned in small groups and fed calf milk replacer twice a day for the next 8-10 weeks, and are then weaned. They are fed on 18% CP grower pellets and barley straw until they are a year old.



Farmer Huw Davies

They are finished off on grass, with access to more concentrate and rolled barley. Cattle are sent every month to slaughter, and at any time there will be around 190 animals on the farm.

Three years ago, a new calf shed had been built on the footprint of the old one. This time, the roof was higher, and a large door installed which was split so that the top half could be kept open to further help ventilation.

However, despite the new housing, calves were succumbing to coughing, and not putting on weight. Huw was regularly having



CALF PNEUMONIA

to treat them with antibiotics and would still lose some calves to pneumonia. He was reluctant to pay to vaccinate, concerned that the costs would outweigh the benefits.

Around this time, Huw changed his vet, and began working with Carmarthen-based XLVets practice - ProStock Vets. He was persuaded to get some veterinary help and advice on resolving the problem, and vet Vikki Wyse visited the farm to assess the situation.

Housing improvements

To test the ventilation in the new shed, Vikki let off some smoke bombs to determine the direction of the natural airflow.



Vikki sets off a smoke bomb

From this, the recommendation was made to put the pens for the new arrivals into the left hand side of the shed as the air movement was from left to right. This meant that the youngest animals were not getting the air from the older ones, and this would help reduce disease challenge.

Outside the shed, the ground rises at one end, and hinders the flow of air inside the building. So to help improve ventilation, some of the side panels were replaced with space boarding, and a fan was installed to facilitate air flow.

'I've also encouraged Huw to keep the whole shed door fully open as much as possible,' adds Vikki.

The nature of this beef system is that animals are bought at markets and therefore come from different sources, and are of an unknown health status.

Vikki explains: 'We also don't know whether they received sufficient colostrum after birth, and it's unlikely that they have been given any vaccinations. On top of this, they will have encountered other animals at the market, and so there's plenty of opportunity for any diseases to be spread. Plus there's the added stress of the transport - to and from the market - which will further challenge their immune system.'

She advised Huw to source calves direct from farms where possible - this would reduce stress, and the health status and quality could be known. Huw has been doing this, and now has a small number of farms that he buys from, in addition to his weekly visit to Cardigan market.





Younger calves in left hand side of shed



Open door of calf shed helps ventilation

Vaccination strategy

There are a variety of viral and bacterial pathogens that can cause respiratory disease, and often more than one can be present on a farm (see Figure 1 on next page).

There are also a variety of vaccines that protect against the major viral pathogens -BRSV (Bovine Respiratory Syncytial Virus), IBR, and PI3 (Bovine Para-influenza 3), as well as the primary bacteria: Mannheimia haemolytica (formerly Pasteurella haemolytica), Pasteurella multocida and Histophilus somni (formerly Haemophilus somni).

Vikki explains: 'So where pneumonia is an ongoing problem, it's important to find out which pathogens are the cause, so that an appropriate vaccine can be selected.

'On farms where this is a stable population of cattle, e.g. suckler herds, then the older cattle can be tested to determine which pathogens they have been exposed to, and then an appropriate vaccine selected to treat the next generation of stock.

'However that approach isn't applicable for Huw due to the multiple sources that calves come from.' So when it came to vaccine choice, Vikki made her recommendation based on when the animals needed to have protection.

Vikki explains: 'Some vaccines require calves to be at least three months old. But Huw's calves were experiencing pneumonia from a very young age.'



CALF PNEUMONIA

Vikki prescribed an intra-nasal vaccine which could be given to calves as young as four weeks of age, and which gave protection against PI-3 and (B)RSV. 'We probably aren't covering all the viruses that the calves are exposed to, but by protecting them against some, along with good management practices, we are helping to reduce the pneumonia challenge,' says Vikki.

'And with the intra-nasal route, a calf gets immediate protection exactly where it's needed. The slight downside is that the bottle contains five doses and once opened, needs to be used up. So for some calves, it can be several days before they can be given protection.'

The modifications to the shed's ventilation and the vaccination policy have made a big difference for Huw. He adds: 'I used to get through around 12 bottles of antibiotic each year, but now I've got one on the shelf, just in case. And when calves do need treatment, they seem to get better faster. Overall, I'm noticing the cattle are putting on weight faster and finishing better too.'



Vikki adds: 'From a financial perspective: although vaccination costs twice as much as a single dose of antibiotic treatment, the fact is, Huw often needed to give a second dose to cure the calf. Plus by preventing respiratory diseases from occurring in the first place, growth potential is not compromised animals will have better feed conversion efficiency and finish faster. Healthy animals are also a lot less work to look after. So vaccination is the better option, overall.

'There is still a risk that BVD could be brought onto the farm if a PI calf was purchased. BVD is highly contagious, and infected animals would suffer weakened immune systems and be more at risk of developing respiratory diseases like pneumonia. To keep BVD out, Huw could look out for calves that have been tested for BVD. There may be a premium for these calves, but it would further safeguard cattle health on the farm. Or he could choose to buy all his calves direct from farms which have eradicated BVD and removed PI animals from the herd.'

Vikki adds: 'An often overlooked factor of respiratory disease is the hygiene in the

shed. It's important that animals have dry bedding. Pneumonia on some farms occurs late in the winter or early spring because so many animals are in the shed, and hygiene has gradually deteriorated. So although it's extra work, it's worth having a good clean out half-way through the housing season.'

Treatment tip

Not all antibiotics treat all of the bacterial causes of pneumonia. So it's still a good idea to test to identify the culprit pathogens - this will help ensure the right antibiotic is being used to treat re-occurring cases on a given farm.

A more complex case

Controlling pneumonia wasn't so simple for Willie Woodman and his beef suckler unit near Haltwhistle in Northumbria.

At Great Chesters, Willie runs a herd of Limousin-cross suckler cows with 100 calving over April and May, and another 150 autumn calvers (August-October). Calves are weaned at 10-12 months of age, and then sold as stores the following spring, at Hexham mart.

Pneumonia had been a problem over the years, especially in the youngstock. Willie's vet Colin Lindsay of Capontree Veterinary Centre in Brampton, had instigated a vaccination protocol.

Colin explains: 'We had blood tested some of the older cattle and identified the presence of IBR and PI3, RSV and BVD, and so an appropriate multi-valent vaccine was being used. But despite this, pneumonia was still endemic. Willie continually had to treat calves with antibiotics, and experienced losses of around 15 calves per season.'

In the spring of 2013, Colin carried out some post mortem examinations on-farm. He explains: 'Infected calves would go downhill very quickly, hence we were expecting acute viral pneumonia such as RSV. However, from the post mortems we discovered that around two-thirds of the lung tissue was damaged. This explained their sudden deterioration there just wasn't enough functional tissue left for them to breathe.'



Farmer Willie Woodman



Colin Lindsay, Capontree Veterinary Centre

CALF PNEUMONIA



Lung samples were sent to the SAC for analysis. The results revealed that the calves were actually suffering from a chronic 'grumbling' bacterial pneumonia caused by Histophilus somni sometimes referred to as 'silent pneumonia'. In addition there was also a strain of Pasteurella present - Pasteurella multocida - that was not covered by any commercial vaccine.

This meant it was necessary to tailor-make a vaccine specifically for use on Willie's farm,' explains Colin. 'The laboratory was able to isolate the specific bacteria, freeze them and send specimens onto a vaccine manufacturer so that an 'autogenous' vaccine could be created that would give cover against both Histophilus somni and Pasteurella multocida. The lab was also instructed to retain the frozen isolates so that Willie would always have a stock of bacteria to draw upon if/when further vaccine needed making.'

The autogenous 'HP' vaccine was first used in winter 2013/14, together with the off-the-shelf multi-valent vaccine which covered RSV, PI3, IBR and BVD. Both required a course of two doses.

Colin explains: 'The plan was to administer the first dose of each to all calves over 10 weeks of age at housing, and then give the booster doses 3-4 weeks later. However the autumn-born calves were coughing and one died before the boosters could be given. A post mortem examination showed it was already affected with the Histophilus bacterium. So the decision was made to accelerate the vaccine protocol and give the second dose after just a 10-day interval. After a week, the coughing had stopped.

On 1st December, any calves (now all housed) which are at least four weeks of age but have not received the two vaccines, are given an intranasal vaccine which covers against RSV and PI3 only. They will be given the HP and multi-valent vaccines once they are 10-weeks old.

The introduction of the custom-made HP vaccine into the vaccination programme has, in Willie's words, been a 'phenomenal success.'

As the table shows, there has been a significant drop in the use of antibiotics. Willie says: 'I can just go to the sheds and have a quick look around them. It's been a pleasure! I only had to treat six calves last winter - before that, it was blanket treatment.

'And I'm seeing significantly better liveweight gains too.'

Colin advises: 'Where, calves are continually coughing and/or developing full blown pneumonia, then instead of just treating all the time with antibiotics, it pays to get some veterinary input. Changes may be needed to the vaccine protocol, or alterations made to housing and management. Bacterial infections from Histophilus and Pasteurella account for 17% of the isolates sent into the AHVLA. But there are currently no commercial vaccines available to protect against these, so it is worthwhile to have a vaccine custom-made for the herd.'



Significant reduction in pneumonia cases thanks to autogenous vaccine				
Year	Calves affected	Calf deaths	Antibiotic usage	
11/12	All	14	All calves	
12/13	All	13	All calves	
13/14	6	2	6 calves	

The viral and bacterial causes of respiratory disease

In 2012, of the samples investigated for respiratory disease by AHVLA, only 38% of cases were preventable with commercially available vaccines since they were caused by RSV, PI3, IBR, Mannheimia. However a further 24% of cases would be prevented by creating autogenous vaccines where the cause(s) is identified as Histophilus somni, Mycoplasma bovis or Pasteurella multocida.

Incidence of respiratory isolates



NEW XLVets farm animal post mortem service

Farmers that have their fallen stock collected by Redferns of Flagg or Brassingtons of Thorncliffe, have been benefiting from the NEW XLVets post mortem service being offered at these two collection centres.

As dead stock is likely to be transported to an approved collector's yard anyway, it is logical to carry out the post mortems there before the carcases are disposed of.

The scheme offers options for cattle and sheep and is particularly targeted at adult animals which are difficult to post mortem adequately on farm.

The post mortem results are reported by the vet carrying out the procedure to your usual vet and laboratory samples are taken if required. These will only be submitted to a laboratory after consent from your vet.

Farm vets from Wright and Morten, Scarsdale Veterinary Group and Glenthorne Vets have been carrying out the post mortems and have found a range of conditions.

The project aims are simple...

To remove the barriers to post mortem services by:-

- Reducing the costs and providing an itemised invoice for work completed.
- Getting results back to you within 24hrs of the carcase arriving at the collection centre.

Why should I ask for a post mortem?

- Gives dead stock a value by alerting you to serious health problems before they spread to the rest of the herd/flock.
- Can be reassuring to know it's a one off.
- If an animal has not responded to treatment it is useful to know for next time.
- Secondary problems are often revealed such as Liver fluke.





WORKING TOGETHER FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE ...



CASE STUDY 1: Mycoplasma bovis

Den Leonard - Lambert Leonard and May

'Mycoplasma bovis seems to be on the increase locally, and we have recently had a devastating outbreak mainly represented in post drying off cows, going down with severe intractable mastitis. During the outbreak we also experienced abortions and one particularly severe pneumonic dry cow, which sadly died'.

'Using the XLVets post mortem service I was able to get the cow collected by the farmer's usual collection centre and post mortemed for under £100 (to the farmer), by a trained vet from Wright & Morten'.

The post mortem vet on duty phoned to ask for some background history and I was able to explain the M.bovis outbreak we were experiencing, and to ask them to specifically look for lesions in the lungs or elsewhere that might yield further evidence of the damage from this bug. The vet duly removed some diseased lung tissue and sent it to Shrewsbury AHVLA who were able to identify M.bovis in the lung tissue'.

'The results of the initial examination were with me within 24 hours and I was able to confirm with the farmer that this animal's death was as a result of the Mycoplasma bovis, and not another cause.

The post mortem service provides a low cost, hassle free solution that has helped us understand more about the problem on farm at relatively little cost to the farmer'.



Carrying out the post mortems

Steph Lyth - Wright & Morten Veterinary Surgeons

'Not everyone's favourite task I'm sure, however the findings of a post mortem can provide real insight into subclinical issues on farm before more animals are affected and clinical disease is identified.'

'The collection centres have great facilities, winches, sharp knives, and a clean

environment which allow for a much more comprehensive post mortem to be carried out, compared with the on farm alternative; hoisting carcases with rope and machinery in a sometimes 'less than clean' environment inevitably affects the quality of the findings.'

Look out for new projects setting up in your area.



nfsco

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OVINE ABORTION







OVINE ABORTION

Abortion in sheep is common, but it should not be thought of as inevitable. There are excellent vaccines for the commonest causes of abortion and some of the other causes have factors that can be reduced.

The most common causes of abortion in sheep are:

- 1 Enzootic Abortion of Ewes (EAE)
- 2 Toxoplasmosis
- 3 Listeria
- 4 Camplyobacter
- 5 Salmonella
- 6 Border disease

Enzootic Abortion of Ewes (EAE)

Chlamydophila abortus is spread through vaginal secretions and placental membranes at lambing. Ewes are normally infected in one year and abort the next. The closer she is to term, the more likely she is to produce viable, but weak lambs. These lambs are technically still abortions and are usually infected with the organism themselves.

Infection causing only a few abortions one year can ultimately lead to over 30% of the flock aborting the following year producing 'abortion storms'. This may also happen following vaccination of an infected flock, as most of the ewes were infected before vaccination. Sourcing replacement stock from flocks 'accredited free' or of known status is strongly advised.

Oxytetracycline can be used as an emergency treatment for new outbreaks, speak to your vet for further advice.





Toxoplasmosis

Table 1: Signs of Toxoplasmosis infection in sheep		
Early pregnancy	Barren ewes at scanning or returning to the ram	
Mid pregnancy	Mummified and aborted foetuses	
Late pregnancy	Weak lambs, or even normal lambs	

The signs seen depend upon the stage of pregnancy, as shown in Table 1.

Infection is only from cat faeces, so a lamb born to a toxoplasma infected ewe is not a carrier for the disease.

Treatment cannot be achieved with antibiotics, although decoquinate can be fed throughout pregnancy, however vaccination offers the best protection. Neutering farm cats also reduces the levels of infection.

Listeria

Usually picked up from poor silage, but can be from soil when grazing is poor.

Salmonella and Campylobacter

Usually from other infected animals e.g. birds. There is no treatment and infection comes in waves, attention to hygiene is crucial.

Border disease

More usually a cause of poor scanning results, it relies on carrier sheep and can be difficult to remove from the flock.

Tickborne fever

Anaplasma phagocytophilum can affect the immune system and increase the susceptibility to other infections.





Human health

Many causes of sheep abortion can affect humans. Therefore it is important that pregnant women are not involved with lambing, or handling clothing in contact with lambing sheep, as these infections can cause abortion in humans. This includes feeding pet, or weak lambs

Of particular concern are Chalamydophila abortion and Q fever, but salmonella and campylobacter are also problems.



ACTION PLAN TO PREVENT ABORTIONS AND REDUCE LOSSES

- Vaccinate all breeding ewes and ewe lambs with vaccines against Toxoplasma and enzootic abortion.
- All replacement animals should be sourced from enzootic abortion free flocks (accredited) and vaccinated before tupping. If not, the vaccine may not be as effective. This includes pet lambs.
- Keep all food stores, including hay, protected from contamination by cat faeces.
- Isolate all aborted ewes away from the remainder of the flock, ideally for four weeks. Remove and burn all bedding from lambing pens and disinfect between ewes.



- Keep aborted foetuses and placentas to submit to veterinary or AHVLA centres for investigation and diagnosis of cause.
- DO NOT foster ewe lambs which could be kept as replacements onto aborted ewes - there is a high chance of the cause of abortion spreading to ewe lambs and causing abortion the following year.
- DO NOT keep surviving ewe lambs from aborted ewes for breeding.
- Ewes that abort are regarded as immune, although may repeatedly abort.
- Use new Electronic Identification Tagging to your advantage - record abortions from individual ewes and use this information when making culling decisions in the future.
- If you have suffered greater than 3% of your flock aborting you definitely need to investigate the cause as losses can escalate the following year. There are schemes available that offer a FREE diagnostic service to test the flock for enzootic abortion/toxoplasmosis, ask your vet for more information.

AUTUMN 2014 ISSUE

FarmSkills



GROWING FARM BUSINESS SUCCESS

Milking routines: The economics of getting it right

It could be argued that the milking period is the most important part of the day, so it is essential to get things right for both productivity and welfare, as well as for economic reasons.

With cows coming in from their summer at pasture, autumn is the ideal time to take a fresh look at your milking routines on the farm and iron out any issues; be they mastitis problems or record keeping etc. for the period ahead.

Good record keeping and communication between staff are essential to the dairy farm business in order to:

- Minimise losses from waste milk, e.g. antibiotic failures, milk taint, high SCC
- Planning for mastitis and SCC control, fertility and feeding

It is important that all dairy staff, be they part of a large shift team, or small family enterprise, know and understand the role of clear, concise and obvious communication and that all happenings that have a possible further outcome are noted and left in a place that the team members and the next shift can readily access.

Four factors which are worth furthe consideration/training for staff:

- Understand the principles of milking machine mechanics and milking cow physiology.
- Knowledge of best practice for milking routine and milking machine maintenance.
- Knowledge of best practice for controlling mastitis and somatic cell counts.
- Implement suitable recording systems and lines of communication between staff.

When to milk

Milking interval is usually determined by conditions on farm and labour availability. Many farms adopt a 10-14 hours milking interval or, increasingly, 12-12 hours. Research has shown that twelve hour intervals result in higher lactation yields which suggests that equal intervals are a more efficient way of milking. Extending the milking interval over 14 hours leads to a yield penalty of 5%, increasing as the interval increases.

Labour availability and cost can also determine how many times a day milking takes place. Twice daily milking is the most common. More frequent milking gives yield benefits of up to 15% (although bear in mind that overall costs may not make three times per day milking economic):

- Milking three times a day increases milk production by 5-15%;
- Lactation becomes more persistent and prolonged.



The reason for this is unclear but it is thought that increased milking results in greater release of prolactin from the pituitary gland, which may lead to the production of more secretory tissue in the udder and a reduction in the chemical feedback inhibitor.

Frequent milking has both long term and short term effects. In the short term, it leads to increased activity in the milk secreting cells while in the long term it leads to an increase in the actual number of milk secreting cells.

DID YOU KNOW that it takes about 60-90 seconds for milk let-down to happen after pressure has been applied to the teat, though this time varies between different cows, age of cow and stage of lactation and can also be affected by a cow being fearful, stressed, in pain or discomfort.



WORKING TOGETHER FOR A HEALTHIER FUTURE ...

Mastitis and cell count control

Good standards of hygiene in the parlour are also imperative and important to get staff to adhere to. Environmental infections may become established during milking time by using poorly cleansed kit. The only reservoir of infection for environmental mastitis is in the environment; this differs from contagious or 'cow associated' mastitis where the major reservoir of infection is inside the udder of infected cows who are effectively acting as carriers.

At milking time, depending on the standard of environmental hygiene achieved on a farm, bacteria will be present to variable degrees on the teat skin as the cows come into the parlour to be milked. These organisms may invade the udder during milking, particularly when milk flow away from the udder is inefficient, therefore a clearly defined cleansing and hygiene procedure both for the cow and milking equipment are essential in keeping this costly condition at bay to avoid:

- Reduced yield during acute infection
- Treatment costs
- Milk withdrawal
- Permanently reduced yield in chronically affected cows
- Sick/dead cows
- Forced culls

Whilst many of the principles of successful milking routines seem basic, a change in staff or occurrence in mastitis problems can reduce productivity and welfare significantly. FarmSkills offers a range of milking routine and environmental mastitis training workshops which can be attended by individual staff members, or held on farm to train your entire team, focussing on specific issues in your routine.

Our workshops cover:

Environmental mastitis

- Define and detect mastitis.
- Name the principal environmental mastitis pathogens.
- Understand the balance between cow defences and the challenge from most common mastitis pathogens.
- Describe the impact of environmental conditions on mastitis rates.
- Outline the key areas of control.
- Calculate the costs associated with mastitis including welfare.

Ailking routines

- Recognise the importance of milking on dairy enterprise economics.
- Understand the principles of milking machine mechanics and milking cow physiology.
- Adopt best practice for milking routine and milking machine maintenance and know what to do in case of machine dysfunction.
- Adopt best practice for controlling mastitis and somatic cell counts.
- Implement suitable recording systems.

FarmSkills workshops are practical, vet led and held on farm so you and your staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to implement your learning back on farm. All our workshops are listed on our website www.farmskills.co.uk and cover a range of dairy, beef, sheep, pig and poultry topics. For further information on what we offer and how we can help contact the team on 01765 608489.

FarmSkills Farmer Portal - log on today!

The FarmSkills Farmer Portal is an innovative and interactive online tool allowing farmers to log their FarmSkills training and development. It is now fully up and running and enables farmers to download their certificates and view recommended workshops taking place in their area.

As well as acting as a useful online training tool, the Portal will also link in with wider national XLVets campaigns, including the Make Your Farm Your Fortress and BVD initiatives, giving farmers further information on what the issues are and how they can get involved on a local and national level.

Accessing the Farmer Portal is easy, simply go to www.farmskills.co.uk/portal to log in and start using today. If you have previously attended some FarmSkills training your record and certificate library will be ready and waiting for you and if you haven't, the system will recommend workshops close to you to get you started.



STUDENT DIARY Alice McLeish, Edinburgh

Third year veterinary student, Edinburgh University

Sheep, Sea Eagles and sensationalism

Every semester, the vet school holds ethics debates - such as on halal meat, veterinary costs and intensive farming methods. One of the general consensuses of these debates is that journalistic sensationalism amplifies most issues. During the summer I've had strong debates concerning farming on two particular topics. In both cases I feel that reporting has created bigger problems that the issue merited.

The first topic relates to our dissertation equivalent, which I have been doing this summer. My project is about the White Tailed Sea Eagle reintroduction into Scotland, their breeding rates, and a plan for further research into the extent of eagle/lamb predation.

It surprises people that my two main interests are Sea Eagles and sheep, but despite news reports of eagles feasting on lambs, I don't believe, and the current research doesn't support, that eagles are a significant problem [see 'The Impact of White Tailed Sea Eagles on Sheep Farming on Mull' (http:// www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/4706 0/0014566.pdf]]. Journalists only report the dramatic stories, but this makes the extreme appear the norm. There was recently a photo published of an eagle carrying a lamb away - while this does happen, anecdotal stories work both ways: I know a sea eagle nest in a tree in a lambing field, and over 10 years no lambs have been taken, but this doesn't make a good news story. Sea Eagles will eat lambs, but I don't believe they don't cause the devastation suggested in news reports.

That is one of the few cases though where farmers are actually seen as the victims by the press - far too often they are vilified, as seen in a recent Independent article 'A Wool Jumper is Just as Cruel as a Mink Coat.' This article was widely read by my friends, with many proclaiming to stop using any sheep

About me

Twenty-one years ago, I met my first sheep while on holiday on the Isle of Skye. My delighted parents realised they'd finally found something to keep me occupied, as I spent the whole week pressed against the window of our house, baa-ing at all the sheep that went past. Jokingly, they said I must be going to be a vet (I couldn't say 'Mummy' or 'Daddy', my vocabulary consisting entirely of animals and animal noises). Several years on, here I am in my third year studying to be a vet in Edinburgh, the city I grew up in, with the hope of becoming a mixed practice vet once I graduate.

products. Again I believe this is journalists magnifying rare happenings to common occurrences - for example, that shearing sheep is cruel and done purely for money; this is certainly not the case at any farm I have known. The article goes on to talk of the cruelty of tail-docking and castrating, but fails to mention the justifiable, often necessary, reasons for doing so.





ealthy lambs require good husbandry

I believe it is one of the benefits of the veterinary profession that we are seen as providing a more neutral view on this sort of case; being seen as caring for the individual animal's welfare, but being able to understand the livestock owner's perspective, and being able to explain this to others. University started back in the middle of September; the first semester is mainly dedicated to a farm animal course, so I hope that by the end of this, amongst other things, I will have a greater ability to explain farm practices to others.



STUDENT DIARY Antonia Matthews BSc, South East London

Second year veterinary student, Royal Veterinary College

No rest for the wicked

My 'last' summer holiday before my clinical years of veterinary medicine has so far provided little rest, between graduating, the continuous care that goes into all the animals, competing the horses, helping with research projects and trying to earn a little cash there have been few chances to relax.

But with friends graduating from their fifth year of the veterinary medicine course it's been refreshing and in some ways terrifying to remember that the real world is out there and in three years I too will be a practising vet. The difficulties attached to becoming the type of vet one wishes to be are becoming more apparent with the reality of the job market and the scarcity of farm animal and mixed animal veterinary jobs currently available to new graduates coming into view. In contrast the university clubs prepared for the new intake of veterinary students in September, with me kept busy trying to get the RVC riding club and polo club more opportunities and sponsorship for the new academic year. The aim is to try and ensure that we can provide a well needed bit of relaxation during the veterinary course for as many students as possible. The university also has academic clubs including the farm animal clinical club which during my time with RVC has taught me a new range of skills from hoof trimming cattle to post mortem investigation skills, all of which have been put to good use on farms.



Graduation from iBSc of Global Health

This year's early harvests have provided hope that hay and straw prices will remain largely stationary in the coming year and also provided me much joy with many a gallop over stubble fields, of course with the farmers' permission. An important part of the veterinary course is being taught to identify a variety of different crops, the importance of feed costs and different farming structures and breeds of cattle. This knowledge has proven its importance on many farming placements with the difficulties seen during parturition for small Limousin heifers put to larger South Devon bulls. It has also proven surprisingly useful for navigating whilst travelling around Hampshire and Cornwall this summer!



South Devon Bull



About me

I am a veterinary student in between my second and third years at the Royal Veterinary College, I am currently finishing a year out to do a degree in Global Health at King's College London. I grew up mostly in South East London spending every moment I could further south east in Kent, working on farms and stable yards. Having escaped living in London I now enjoy the fresh air of Hertfordshire with the husband, dogs, cats, small furries, reptiles, horses and my own small herd of dairy goats.

I have had important reminders this summer of the risks and dangers of working with animals and why health and safety are covered as an important part of the veterinary course. These have varied from my show pony falling over in the horse trailer (fortunately no permanent damage done) and the goats somehow learning to open their Heras fencing enclosure resulting in a more than slightly upset herd of horses; thankfully the goats seemed to respond very well to being herded back to their enclosure!



Peach and Dell Boy: Transporting animals is never without its dramas



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Text 07854 063384 Telephone 01765 608489 E-mail farmskills@xlvets.co.uk













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