**Newsletter September 2017**

**Improve your efficiency - Scan your cows!**

Systems vary – but it is calculated that 55 to 70 percent of the costs associated with beef suckler herds are related to feed, particularly through the winter. Therefore surely it makes sense to try to minimise the numbers of cows requiring that feed by getting rid of as many unproductive ones as you can. Remember that based on average Scottish figures, this could be as many as 20 percent of the herd.

Pregnancy diagnosis by ultrasound is a well-recognised, straight-forward and inexpensive way of tightening up calving periods and improving efficiency in a beef herd. Please consider using it. We are now scanning cattle on a regular basis at a competitive rate, and ready to check your cows as they start coming in for the winter. Just give us a call.

The best time to get cows scanned is at 6 – 16 weeks (1.5 – 4 months) of gestation, however they can be done at any stage. Speed is usually similar to manual diagnosis if just pregnant or not pregnant is required however checking for heart beats, sexing and aging accurately is a little more time consuming.

**Sheep Scab**

This is still a serious problem amoung sheep flocks, and we diagnose it fairly regularly. It is caused by the mite Psoroptes ovis, and cattle are rarely affected. Direct contact between sheep is the most common form of spread. Recently infected sheep may not initially show any signs so do watch the flock after purchasing animals, bringing flocks home from grazing, or when there has been a break in, or out. Handling facilities, equipment, transport and dirty clothing can also spread disease.

The Sheep Scab (Scotland) Order 2010 requires that a person who has possession of an infected sheep or is suspicious it has scab must inform APHA as soon as possible. It can lead to weight loss and poor lamb growth.

The signs are as follows; intense itching, chewing at the flanks, foot stamping, rubbing off fences and wool loss. The skin then becomes thickened and leathery in the later stages and sheep can show fitting type behaviour when handled. It is very important to differentiate it from lice, which causes similar signs but isn’t usually as severe.

Diagnosis is based on the characteristic clinical signs and we can perform skin scrapes which isolate the mites. A blood sample can also be done, in the early stages on the rare occasion where there is suspicion but not yet any clinical signs.

Treatment can include organophosphorus sheep dipping, or injections of a range of drugs. The most common being Macrocyclic Lactones, Ivermectin, or Doramectin (Dectomax) or Moxidectin. Most of these require 2 injections as there is always the chance that not all mites are killed with one injection. The macrocyclic lactones (avermectin and milbemycin) are discouraged as they don’t tend to fully kill off other parasites such as lice, keds, flies etc and the gut worms, so may lead to resistance.

It’s best to try and avoid sheep scab in the first place by following the rules below.

* Maintain a closed flock wherever possible.
* Maintain secure double-fenced perimeters where they contact other fields containing sheep.
* Treat all purchased sheep upon arrival on farm and quarantine for the correct time.
* Investigate all cases of pruritus and fleece loss.