

Sheep & Beef Talk

November 2017



Beef Cow Pre-Mating Check

Spring has well and truly arrived and calving is progressing nicely (or finished for some) so what better time to begin thinking about starting the cycle off again...

Here is a checklist of pre-mating topics for your beef herd.

CONDITION (and weight for R2s):
Cows need to be in good condition (BCS 3 out of 5) and be well fed after calving to move from calving to being pregnant again within the ideal 6-10 weeks. Likewise R2 heifers need to be well-grown to be fertile and to ensure healthy calving size. The target is 60% of their mature weight. For a 500 kg mature cow weight, R2 heifers should be at least 300 kg at mating.

While logistics are often difficult in beef herds over calving, any cows in poor condition, or any that have needed help with calving/retained membranes etc. may need priority feeding and/or treatment to get them up to speed.

TRACE ELEMENTS:
Following on from the above, if you are intervening with any cows or heifers that are below the desired size/condition by feeding them more, you need to be sure they can respond to the special treatment. To do this they need to

have enough selenium and copper. Low copper and selenium levels can also have direct negative effects on fertility. These trace elements are easy to test for if you haven't tested animals recently. Cattle are easy to supplement if testing shows levels are low to ensure you are getting good value from the extra feed.

Copper injection needs to be given at least a month before mating as it can interfere with cycling. Selenium can be given closer to mating, but should be corrected as soon as possible.

DRENCH (including fluke):
Well fed mixed age beef cows are unlikely to need a drench for roundworms. Heifers & poor conditioned cows may need a targeted treatment to give them a chance to respond to preferential feeding. In liver fluke areas, a combination fluke specific drench may be required.

BVD:
Many farms have some sort of BVD management programme in place. This may include:

- ▮ Testing calves and/or replacement heifers
- ▮ Vaccination of replacement heifers (two shots pre-mating)
- ▮ Booster vaccination for bulls. Do this ASAP if you haven't done it already
- ▮ Vaccination of mixed age cows

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Beef Cow Pre-Mating Check Continued...

Ensuring all new bulls are BVD tested negative and vaccinated twice before purchase, this needs to happen 3 - 4 weeks apart.

We appreciate that the timing and logistics of these various jobs can be tricky for beef herds, but ideally they should be completed 3-4 weeks prior to mating. We can help you figure out the most practical time to fit these jobs into your calendar.

✓ BULL HEALTH:

All of the above points apply, and possibly more importantly, to the smaller but just-as-vital half of the mating process. Bulls need to be fit, well-conditioned, sound for mating multiple cows, and safeguarded from breakdown as far as is possible. So as with cows, body condition, fitness,

and trace element status have to be adequate. Any lameness issues to do with feet/claws should be well treated by now.

Capacity to serve should ideally be checked annually. We look for soundness of the legs, hips and spine as well as the testes and penis. Note that dominant bulls with a problem in one of these departments can hold cows and prevent sound bulls from mating, leading to very disappointing pregnancy rates. The numbers of fit bulls must also be right for the cow herd size, cow age, terrain and paddock size. Bull teams need to be made to minimise fighting.

How many of the above can you tick off? Give your local VetEnt clinic a call if anything needs attention!

Triple Drench Resistance Is Here To Stay

The graph below is a summary from the lab for 2012 – 2015 showing the percentage of farms where there are resistant worms to each of the main drench families (see key below graph). The number at the top of each column is the number of drench tests done with that drench family. You can see that there was a higher percentage of resistance on farms in the North Island compared to the South Island. But, there are farms on both islands (81 tests in the North Island and 60 tests in the South Island) with worms' resistance to the triple combination (light blue bar).

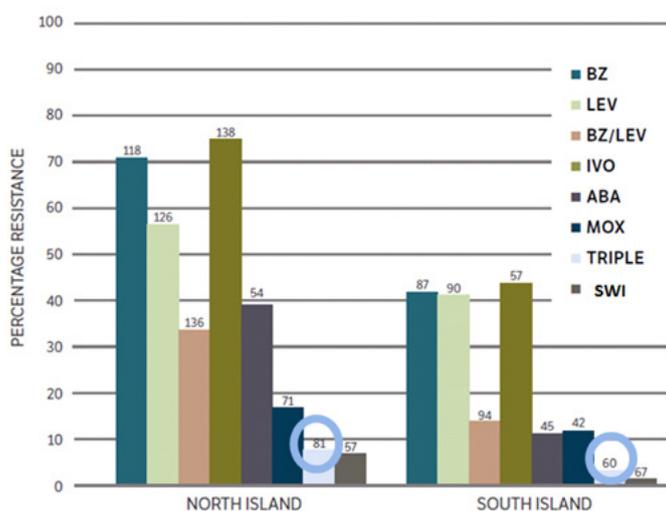


FIGURE 1: Prevalence of resistance to anthelmintics in any parasite genus other than *Nematodirus* recorded in sheep FECRTs submitted to Gribbles Veterinary laboratories during 2012-15. BZ = benzimidazole, LEV = levamisole, BZ/LEV = benzimidazole-levamisole combination, IVO = ivermectin, ABA = abamectin, MOX = moxidectin, TRIPLE = benzimidazole-levamisole-abamectin combination, SWI = levamisole-abamectin combination. The numbers at the tops of columns represent the number of valid tests carried out with each anthelmintic.

It is not shown on the graph, but no resistance was found in sheep when either of the new drenches (Startect or Zolvix Plus) was used. However, resistance has been found to these drenches in sheep in Australia and in goats in New Zealand so they are not the cure for drench resistance.

What does this mean for your farm?

For all farms: A key part of managing worms is using effective drenches. You need to know which drenches are effective on your farm. To find this out we need to do a drench test (also called a FECRT = Faecal Egg Count Reduction Test). This testing is best carried out in a mob of lambs during the summer period. The testing involves dung sampling lambs, drenching the lambs individually with a range of drench types and dung sampling again in 10 days.

When introducing new sheep (including rams):

There is a chance the new sheep may be arriving with triple drench resistant worms inside them. These need to be taken care of with a quarantine programme, including using either Startect or Zolvix Plus and having somewhere any resistant eggs can be deposited.

If you would like to have a test done on your farm or would like to discuss your quarantine programme contact your local VetEnt vet to start planning now.

