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Autumn Newsletter

October 2025

Autumn updates from your farm vet team:

As the leaves turn and the evenings draw in, we're embracing the autumn shift here at The Livestock Clinic. It's a busy time on-farm, and we're here to support you through it with practical advice, seasonal reminders, and a roundup of what we've been up to over the last couple of months.

In this edition, we're highlighting the risk of acorn toxicity, which poses a significant threat to grazing livestock at this time of year. We'll also guide you through pre-breeding checks for rams and ewes, helping to maximise fertility and productivity ahead of tupping season, as well as a round up of our show season, including some great moments from the events we were proud to support and sponsor.

As always, we're just a call away if you need any advice or assistance.

Best Wishes,

The Livestock Clinic Team

Acorn Toxicity: What you need to know

You've probably seen recent news articles regarding acorn toxicity leading to the deaths of sheep and cows around the country. This autumn is proving to be a very hazardous period for ruminants due to the abundance of acorns after the warm dry spring. Recent high winds have resulted in mass fall of the acorns but there are still many on the oak trees surrounding pasture. In the last few weeks we have seen numerous cases of acorn toxicity of varying severity from mild diarrhoea to deaths, abortions and congenital issues.



Acorns contain tannins and phenolic compounds which, when eaten, lead to damage of the gastrointestinal tract followed by acute kidney damage.

The severity depends on amount eaten, acorn condition (green acorns are more toxic), animal age, and overall health.

Symptoms

Symptoms usually develop over several days but can occur even after the consumption of acorns has stopped.

- Loss of appetite, depression
- Constipation or diarrhoea with dark/black faeces due to bleeding
- Urine changes - increased frequency of urination or no urination. Severe cases – blood in urine
- Colic (Abdominal pain)
- Acute kidney injury
- Acutely affected animals can die within 24 to 72 hours
- Some animals that survive beyond this may lose weight and become chronically ill thriven.
- Oedema - Swelling around the jaw, chest and abdomen.

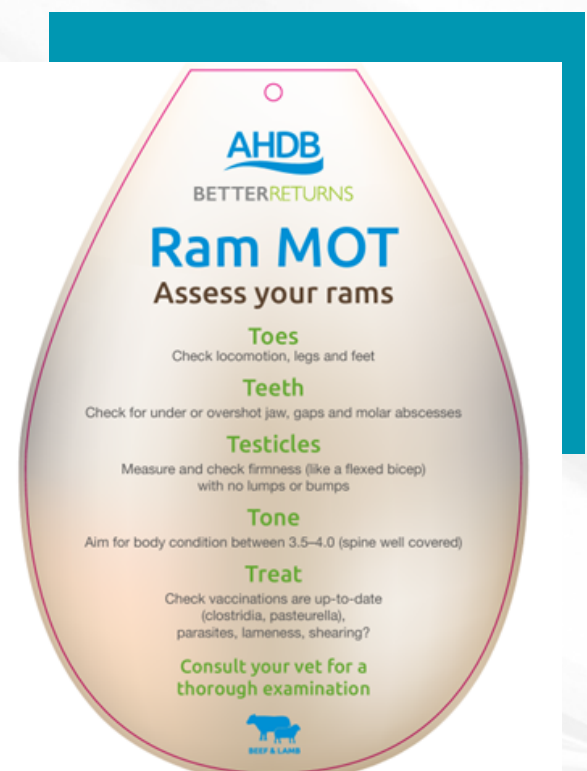
Prevention: No specific treatment so prevention is key!

- Restricting access to areas under oak trees with many fallen acorns, moving stock, fencing off risky areas.
- Move to pasture without oaks trees (this is difficult / impossible for some)
- Ensuring adequate forage so animals are less likely to eat acorns.
- Severe cases – house animals to prevent consumption.
- Acorns can be fed to pigs without issues in moderate amounts but they are not immune to the effects.

If poisoning is suspected, immediate veterinary care is needed. However, no specific antidote or treatment exists; treatment is supportive – rehydration and pain relief. Removal from acorns obviously is the most important step. Bloods can indicate the level of kidney damage and likelihood of a positive outcome.

Ram Fertility Testing: Don't wait until scanning to find out if your ram has worked!!

As we move into the autumn period, sheep breeding season will be getting under way once again. Good ram fertility is a vital part of ensuring an efficient lambing season and maximising the lambing percentage. This is especially important in single ram systems where infertility could result in a delayed and lengthened lambing period. Full infertility in rams is fairly uncommon but subfertility is seen in around 20% of rams.



Poor fertility is a consequence of testicular degeneration (which presents as soft testicles and poor semen quality). Testicular degeneration is seen especially in hot summers - when sheep are hot they lie down to cool down but in doing so trap, and 'cook' their testicles underneath. Other causes of pyrexia such as viral and bacterial infections and some vaccines can cause temporary sub-fertility.

Scrotal dermatitis (eg due to sheep scab) is also known to negatively impact fertility. A ram coming into tupping in less than optimal condition is likely to have a poorer fertility however, if detected well in advance of breeding there is still time to improve ram nutrition and salvage fertility in time.

Ideally, rams require testing at least 10 weeks before breeding begins so if any treatable issues are discovered they can be resolved in good time prior to tupping without impacting on sperm production and also allows new rams to be sourced if untreatable issues are found.

The fertility test involves a general physical exam of the ram with close examination of the toes, teeth and testes. After this a sperm sample will be examined under a microscope to give a detailed evaluation of fertility. Results for this will be given at the end of the examination on farm.

Please contact the practice for further information or to book a ram MOT.

Protecting Your Pigs: Why Vaccination Matters for Smallholders:

In smallholder and pet pig herds, the main disease risks aren't always visible — they're the ones that strike suddenly and fatally. Two of the most serious are clostridial infections and erysipelas.

Clostridial Diseases:

Clostridial bacteria live in soil and the intestines of healthy animals. They can survive for years and release powerful toxins when conditions allow them to multiply.



These diseases often cause sudden death, with little or no warning. Common examples include tetanus, which causes stiffness, spasms, and difficulty walking; and enterotoxaemia, which affects young pigs and causes rapid death or bloody diarrhoea. Other types can cause severe swelling or internal bleeding. Once symptoms appear, treatment is rarely effective — vaccination is the only reliable protection.

Erysipelas

Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae is a bacterium found in soil, faeces, and carrier pigs. Almost all pigs are exposed during their lives, but vaccination determines whether they fall ill. The acute form causes sudden fever, loss of appetite, and sometimes diamond-shaped skin patches. Pigs may die within days if untreated. The chronic form can cause arthritis, heart damage, or infertility, leading to long-term welfare and productivity issues. Erysipelas spreads easily through contaminated bedding, faeces, or equipment, especially in warm, wet conditions. Regular vaccination greatly reduces outbreaks and carrier pigs.

Vaccination Plan We recommend using Bravoxin (for clostridial diseases) once yearly, and Eryseng (for erysipelas) every six months for ongoing protection.

Pros:- Strong protection against sudden deaths and long-term losses- Reduced antibiotic use and stress for pigs and owners- Safer herd introductions and improved welfare

Possible downsides:- Time and cost of boosters- Mild, temporary swelling at the injection site.

If you keep a breeding herd, additional vaccines may be needed to protect fertility and piglet health — please contact our team for tailored advice.

Vaccination remains one of the most effective and welfare-friendly ways to safeguard your pigs. A consistent routine provides peace of mind that you've done everything possible to prevent fast-moving, devastating diseases.

Healthy pigs are happy pigs — and regular vaccination keeps them that way.

Worming young cattle at housing:

It is important to worm young cattle (1st and 2nd year grazing) this winter at housing, or if overwintered outside, when the temperature drops below 10°C. Individual adult cattle should only be wormed if they are looking poor (ideally confirmed by a faecal worm egg count), as they should have good immunity against the worms. If liver fluke is a problem on the farm then all cattle should be fluke treated around the same time, to eliminate existing fluke burdens and reduce pasture contamination in the following year.

The wormer used should be a 3-ML ivermectin-based wormer (N.B. organic farms cannot use ivermectins, as a rule). 3-ML wormers will kill overwintering *Ostertagia* worm larvae (and other gut and lung worms) in the animal, preventing a very severe illness called type 2 ostertagiasis.



Type 2 ostertagiasis is caused by the maturation and emergence of *Ostertagia* larvae that have been inhibited over the winter in the gastric glands in the mucosa of the abomasum (4th stomach) of the cattle. If maturation and emergence of the larvae is synchronous then severe clinical disease can be seen in the late winter or early spring. If emergence occurs over a longer period, then the disease may be less severe or not evident at all. However, this presentation will still result in significant pasture contamination for the forthcoming season, resulting in the need for more worming treatments.

Clinical signs can include diarrhoea, significant weight loss and, in chronic cases, oedema (often seen under the jaw or on the brisket) associated with hypoproteinaemia. The severe cases, group outbreaks and deaths are easy to identify, but the milder cases may go unnoticed with any diarrhoea being put down to lush spring grass. The abomasal damage can be significant in surviving animals and therefore chronic ill thrift can be a feature.

Show sponsorship round-up.

We've been lucky enough to sponsor a multitude of country shows this year, from The South of England, Chertsey, Cowpie down to the alpaca section at the Ellingham and Ringwood show.

We had a wonderful time supporting the Small Shepherds club annual show in Cranleigh this August and finished the season off with a stand at the Alresford Show. Thank you to everyone who came up to have a chat, we love seeing you out and about and hope to sponsor some more fantastic shows next year.



A message from the office:

When paying your monthly invoices via BACs please state the invoice reference which is located in the top left hand corner, under your address - e.g '1-123'. This will help our office team to locate your payments efficiently and ensure they are logged against your account in a timely manner.

Cancelled visits:

We understand that circumstance change and we endeavour to do our best to be as flexible as possible. If a visit is cancelled when the vet is already en-route then a visit cancellation fee will be incurred. While this doesn't help us recover the vet's wasted time it helps us recoup some of the travel costs. We are grateful for your understanding



Upcoming Events.

2025

The Old Stables,
Wisborough Green,
RH14 0HJ

OCT
24

ALPACA NUTRITION TALK

An informative and interactive meeting led by Lissie, our camelid practice certificate holder.

2.45 - 4pm, The Farmhouse Cafe, Worplesdon

NOV
12

OPEN FARM AND NURTURE FARM NETWORKING

Networking, problem solving, vet guidance on maintaining high welfare standards
5- 7pm, Merrist Wood College

NOV
19

BACKYARD POULTRY SESSION **SOLD OUT!!**

An educational session on first aid and common health concerns for your birds. Perfect for new and experienced poultry keepers alike.

2 - 4pm, The Old Stables

DEC
11

MANAGEMENT OF THE LATE GESTATION BEEF COW

An interactive session on managing the late gestation beef cow and early calvers.

2- 4pm, The Old Stables