Spring Newsletter

March 2026

SPRING HAS SPRUNG...

As we head into the busy spring season, it's a crucial time for livestock businesses of all sizes. Whether you're managing a growing smallholding or running a large commercial enterprise, the months ahead bring both opportunity and challenge.

In this addition we're focussing on colostrum quality, the cornerstone of strong calf, lamb and kid health; and highlighting spring parasite risks, with timely guidance on monitoring, prevention strategies, and sustainable control to protect performance and profitability as grazing gets underway.

We hope you find this issue informative and useful. As always, our team is here to work alongside you, helping you make confident decisions that support healthy animals and resilient businesses throughout the season ahead.

The Livestock Clinic Team

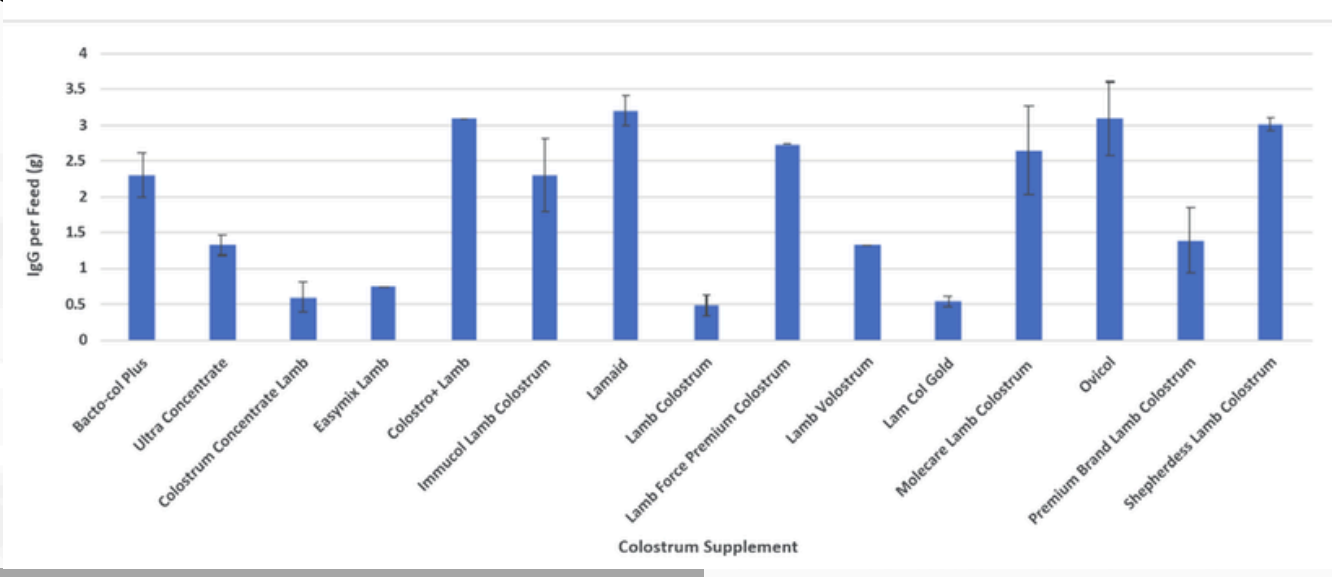
Are you clued up on colostrum for Lambing?!

Colostrum is the key factor to ensure the best chances of survival in the critical first days and weeks of life for all neonates of ruminant species. It is a vital energy source and provides all the antibodies neonatal ruminants require to establish their immune system. Without it, they cannot defend themselves from disease.
Lambs that fail to receive sufficient colostrum often exhibit poorer productive performance in later life. Conversely a strong, healthy lamb, up and sucking within 15 minutes of birth has a 90–95% chance of still being alive 90 days later!
Nearly half of all lamb losses occur within the first 48 hours of life - associated with septicaemia following inadequate colostrum intake, starvation and hypothermia.

QUALITY – QUANTITY - QUICKLY

Colostrum quality is also crucial! Drinking a sufficient quantity of poor quality colostrum will still leave a neonate immune-compromised. The fat, protein and antibody content all have a huge impact on survival rates.
- Ensuring breeding females are in the correct body condition is vital. Poor conditioned animals make poor quality colosturm
o Animals which are well under the optimum condition should not be selected for breeding.
o Offer colostrum supplementation to the lambs and calves of poorly conditioned dams
o If your animals are not holding optimum condition have a conversation with your vet.
- Getting ewe nutrition right is essential. Inadequate nutrition reduces the quantity of colostrum and milk produced, delays the onset of lactation and increases the thickness of colostrum (lambs may find more difficult to extract overly thick colostrum from the teat)
Measuring Quality: Assessing of colostrum quality using a Brix refractometer is a very common practice on cattle dairy farms, however it is more rarely used with beef cattle and sheep. Brix refractometers are cheap to purchase (£20-30 on amazon). Colostrum quality can be tested quickly and easily and should be 26.5% IgG for lambs.
AHDB website has more information on how to carry this out: https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge library/using-a-brix-refractometer

Colostrum quantity:
Make sure lambs receive 200 ml of colostrum within two hours of birth.
Over 24 hours, a newborn lamb must receive the equivalent of 200 ml/kg body weight in colostrum.
- For example: a 5 kg lamb needs 1 litre of colostrum in the first day of life.
- 200ml within 2 hours and then 800ml over the next 22 hours
After six hours, the lamb's ability to absorb the immunoglobulins from its guts into its bloodstream reduces which is why it is important to get colostrum in quickly.
The primary antibody in colostrum is immunoglobulin G (IgG). Its concentration in milk decreases rapidly after birth diminishing to zero by about 23 hours post lambing. Another reason to get colostrum in quickly.
Alternative to ewe's colostrum: what to do if your ewe doesn't have enough colostrum. Planning ahead is key!! Don't be caught out without an alternative
- Colostrum from another ewe in the flock
- Pooled cow colostrum
o some cows' colostrum has been found to contain antibodies which cause a breakdown of red blood cells in sheep so pooling reduces risk.
- Artificial colostrum
o Artificial colostrum is designed as a supplement, not a replacement for ewes' colostrum and should only be used as a last resort.
o Many products are sold for use as colostrum alternatives
§ colostrum replacers are a substitute for maternal colostrum whilst supplements are to be used in addition to maternal colostrum not as a replacement. It is important to know what you are buying!
§ Other products can also be easily mistaken for colostrum substitutes such as energy boosting oral drenches, probiotics and pastes. These will not offer the same crucial antibodies, fats and proteins that a good quality ewes' colostrum provides are not a substitute to replace colostrum intake.
A study in 2020 of lamb colostrum supplements demonstrated a large variability in IgG (antibody) levels between commercially available colostrum substitutes (the higher the IgG the better!).



Spring parasite risks:

After the winter period coccidia and intestinal worms will begin to wake up resulting in poor growth rates and losses in severe cases.
Regular worm egg counts over this period remain important alongside monitoring change in body condition, mucous membrane colour and diarrhoea.
Due to the mild autumn and dry summer, we have seen more cases of high worm burdens continuing into the winter period.
Creating a risk profile of your grazing fields is a helpful tool to predict the risk posed by pasture. Many clients use fixed pasture, grazing young lambs and kids in the same fields year on year. Younger animals have not developed any immunity to worms and coccidia and numbers rapidly increase in their gut leading to a higher output of eggs onto pasture.
These fields therefore pose a higher risk than if they had been rested. When temperatures start to rise and rainfall continues hatching will begin. Some worm species are also able to overwinter in adults then continue development and begin shedding eggs as the day length increases. Close monitoring during this period is important to prevent losses.
Rotation of pasture, is a useful tool in slowing down the rate at which worm burdens rise. It is generally poorly understood how long these parasites survive on pasture and longer rest periods are needed to gain clean pasture once again.
Graph below:

	HIGH	MED	LOW
SPRING	Ewes and lambs grazed in previous year/ spring (nematodirus). Goats grazed in previous year. Store lambs in previous autumn/winter.	Grazed by adult non-lactating sheep in prev year. Grazed in previous spring by ewes and lambs but then no further grazing occurred. (Nematodirus still high risk)	New leys / forage crops. Cattle in previous year. Not grazed by any sheep in previous 2 years.
SUMMER	Ewes and lambs grazed in previous year.	Adult non-lactating sheep only in spring. Cattle grazed in spring.	New leys / forage crops. Cattle only in first half of grazing season.
AUTUMN/WINTER	Ewes and lambs grazed all season.	Grazed by cattle since spring. Grazed by mature dry ewes since weaning.	New leys / forage crops. Cattle only in first half of grazing season.

Sheep, goats and alpacas all share the same worm species whilst different species effect cattle and horses. Rotating small ruminants and alpacas with cattle or horses allows continued use of pasture whilst slowing the cycle of these worms and is often underutilised.

With lambing and kidding underway it is important to note breeding animals will undergo a lapse in immunity to these worms. Ensuring they are in good condition and have sufficient dietary protein can help reduce the impact of this drop in immunity. Body condition is one of the major factors affecting the ewe's immunity in this period rather than number of offspring carried. Getting nutrition right in this period for pregnant females is important not only for foetal growth and colostrum production but also to reduce parasite burdens. Reducing the shedding of eggs on pasture will have the longer term benefit of reducing the risk on these pastures in the summer months. The link below offers an in depth view of nutrition in the last few weeks before lambing:

https://projectblue.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/Imported%20Publication%20Docs/FeedingTheEweGuide_240613_Web.pdf

Metabolic profiling of ewes can be carried out to ensure they are getting the nutritional requirements needed, this is typically done 3 weeks prior to lambing.

Use this forecast from scops to monitor risk period during the spring season for nematodirus: https://www.scops.org.uk/forecasts/nematodirus-forecast/

A NOTE FROM THE OFFICE:

Faecal samples:
If you are sending faecal samples to our office for worm egg count testing, please ensure they arrive in sample pots, correctly labelled so our office staff do not have to handle the samples before sending them to the lab. From this month any samples that have to be pre-prepared prior to lab testing will incur a **£6 ex vat** processing fee. You can pick sample pots up from both our Guildford or Wisborough Green office or request some to be posted.

Office hours:
Please note, our office hours are **8.30am - 5pm** and the on call vet cannot answer office enquires outside on these hours. Anything non-urgent will be pushed to the next working day.

Thank you for your understanding and as always, we're only a call away 24/7!

The Livestock Clinic Team.