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Calving and Lambing

Part 1 – Lambing

- The Vets Perspective



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Who am I



- George Niven
- From Northwest of Northern Ireland
- Graduated from the University of Glasgow in 2013
- Worked in mixed animal practice in Aberdeenshire for 4 ½ years
- Joined SAC Vet Services in February 2018



Tonights talk



- Please everyone get involved if you have any thoughts
- Planning/prevention balanced with short term problem solving
- Going to focus on immediate trouble shooting more than long term planning
- Most issues are relevant to both Lambing and Calving but I'll focus on lambing just now and come back to calving in my later talk.
- The pattern for both talks will be
 - Preparation
 - Prevention of problems
 - Problem solving



Biosecurity



- Incoming stock are biggest risk for bringing disease in
- Make sure people and equipment are clean before coming on farm
- Try to keep high risk people/equipment away from livestock areas
- Aborting animals – aborted materials



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Nutrition - before and around calving/lambing



- Kirsten will talk more about this
- Metabolic profiling at the start of calving/lambing period
 - Blood sample 10 ewes from group in last 6 weeks of pregnancy - £40
- Avoid poor quality feed/damp silage – especially around calving/lambing time
 - Several cases a silage due to fungal abortion/bad silage



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Hygiene in pen

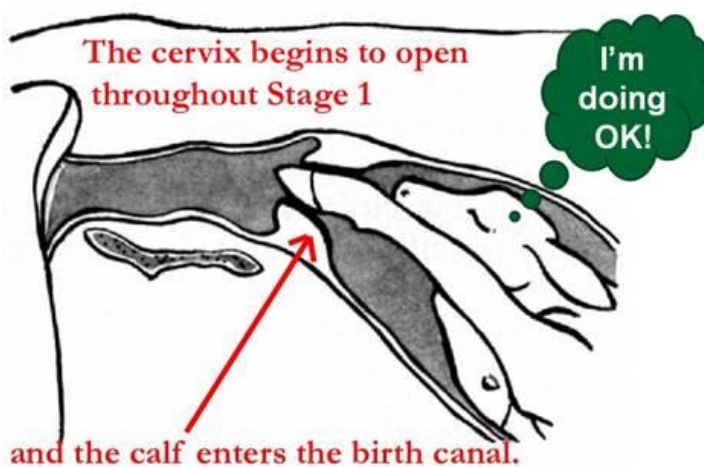


- Clean calving/lambing pen
 - Mucking out between calvings reduces spread of long term infectious disease such as Johne's Disease
- Dipping navel – discuss later
- Infectious scours will multiply up and are more likely to be seen at the end of calving period due to build up of infection in pen
- Cleanse lying around increases risk of neospora in cattle or Toxoplasma in sheep



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Call the Vet in time



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Call the Vet in time



- 3 Stages of labour
 - 1 - restless ewe/cow and water bag out (irregular contractions but won't see this externally) about 2-6hrs normally
 - 2 - the actual birth - cervix open, calf/lamb in birth canal, 0.5-4hrs
 - 3 - the cleanse (only really an issue if she looks sick or more than 3 days retained)
- Stuck in stage 1 "not getting on with it" vs stuck physically (stage 2)
- Intervene if
 - Stage 1 over 8hrs
 - Stage 2 over 2hrs – or straining for 30mins but no progress – or stopped trying
 - Swelling of calf/lamb – fatigue – excessive bleeding
- If Calf/Lamb is physically stuck or in any doubt always call your vet



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Clearing Airways



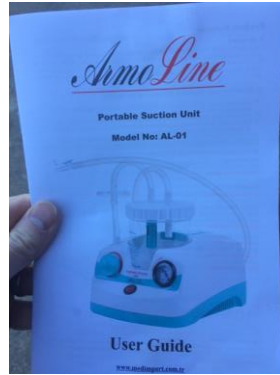
- Getting lamb or calf breathing clearly and quickly reduces risk of acidosis/dopey animals
- Standard techniques such as swinging, hanging over gates, etc can cause trauma
- Stimulating sneezing (eg. straw, smelling salts, vinegar)
- Potential benefit to using suction/resuscitator kits – approx £100
- Either way important thing is to clear airway and stimulate breathing as rapidly as possible



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Clearing Airways

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Colostrum

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- “Colostrum is gold” campaign from RUMA
- 3 Q's
 - Quality – Quantity (200ml for a 5kg lamb) – Quick (<2hrs after birth)
 - 1litre over first 24hrs for a 5kg lamb
 - 3litres in first 3hrs for a beef calf
- Low colostrum calves are twice as likely to develop respiratory disease and can have a mortality rate as high as 13%
- 0% incidence of watery mouth (E coli) in lambs with confirmed colostrum intake
 - Spectinomycin (Spectam) resistance in nearly 50% of lamb E. coli
- Always ensure good hygiene with stomach tubes and bottles to avoid spreading infections
- Can use cow colostrum for lambs but must check for anti-sheep antibodies
 - we can run sample in Craibstone lab







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Vaccination around calving/lambing


- Vaccines can boost colostral immunity
- Be sure to balance disease risk with vaccine cost
- Multivalent clostridial vaccine will help boost immunity but ensuring good nutritional status of ewes will give greatest benefit to quality of colostrum
- Clostridial vaccines are relatively cheap
- Plan this in conjunction with your vet so plan is tailored to the risks on your farm










Twin Lamb disease

- Due to negative energy balance (negative nutritional state) in the ewe for a prolonged period
- Treatment
 - reduce energy requirements on the ewe
 - Remove/foster away excess lambs
 - In extreme cases induce lambing early
 - increase the energy available for the ewe
 - Propaline glycol is a more sustainable energy source for sheep and cattle than sugar
 - calcium borogluconate under the skin



Navel Ill / Joint Ill



- Prevention better than cure
- Colostrum, pen hygiene and navel dipping
- Avoid Routine antibiotics – don't treat healthy animals
- White antibiotics (Penicillins) will generally clear infection but can take a long time for swelling to resolve even once infection cleared
 - leave lancing to vets as can do a lot of harm
 - SAC study on joint ill in lambs 2017 88% resistant to Oxytet, 69% resistant to neomycin, 15% resistant to Tylosin
- When you see a Navel or Joint Ill try to think ahead to the next calving/lambing – “need to check we're doing x, y & z correctly”



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Handling Lost Stock/Abortions



- Diagnostic rate of around 80% for Lost stock
 - Good habit to get into is submitting a quarter of lost stock for PM just to monitor any issues on farm
- Can be harder to ID cause of abortion
 - may take multiple submissions – So submit samples from beginning of outbreak
 - Abortions often caused by infection in the placenta so better chance of finding the cause if cleanse submitted along with Lamb/Calf
 - Most abortions in sheep have an infectious cause – well worth identifying cause for treatment/prevention/management long term
- Take care when handling material from aborted ewe – most common causes can infect humans



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Preparation



- Biosecurity
- Nutrition
- Hygiene
- Handling Facilities



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Handling Facilities



- Design
- Hygiene
- Lighting
- Table



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Prevention of problems



- When to intervene in Calving/Lambing
- Colostrum
- Vaccination
- Navel Dipping



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Call the Vet in time



- Signs may be going to be difficult
 - Over conditioned mother
 - Bull/Tup throwing big calves/lambs
 - Struggling to keep head in birth canal/feet crossing over when pulled
 - Gimmer/Heifer or previously had a c-section
 - Breeds with a bigger backend
 - “Got a bad feeling” – don’t ignore your gut - better to have your vet and not need them



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Call the Vet in time











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Navel Dipping

- Iodine vs chlorhexidine – add surgical spirit?
- What really matters isn't product choice, its making sure navel is fully/accurately dipped
- As soon as possible after birth
- Clean bed, Navel dipping, Colostrum

Problem solving – Common problems

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- Twin Lamb Disease
- Navel/Joint Ill
- Down Cow
- Acidosis in Calves
- Scours



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Down Cows

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- Metabolic problem – (milk fever, staggers, low phosphate)
 - May want vet out - blood sample to confirm metabolic cause? IV injection?
- “Toxic” – bacterial endotoxaemia (E. coli mastitis, toxic metritis)
 - Likely to be cold, may look dehydrated, act fast – call your vet
- Calving injury – nerve or ligament damage
- Once cause identified and treatment plan started nursing becomes key to survival/recovery
 - Reduce time spent laying on one side – roll or hoist up
 - Bring food and water
 - Avoid bullying



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Acidosis in calves



- Low blood pH – blood becomes more acidic than normal
- Due to build up of CO₂ if in distress before birth
- Calves look dull/depressed/dopey, breathing heavily or irregularly, not sucking, still not lifting head over 5mins old, lack of foot withdrawal reflex
- Treatment
 - Oral bicarb only poorly effective on blood pH
 - IV bicarbonate along with IV fluids, followed by feeding once sucking reflex returns



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Calf Scours



- Identify the cause early if possible (Scour check test or leave a sample to your vet)
- Keep hydrated – oral fluids are the best, IV if needed (eg. Very severe or acidotic) but cant give energy in IV
- Calves/Lambs need nutrition not just fluid – remember to give milk too
- Keep warm
- Good nursing will save these calves – testing dung will help you avoid further losses
- High quality colostrum and good hygiene will avoid a lot of problems



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Record Keeping



- How many have been affected by any given illness (even just a simple tally)?
- Getting easier to keep pen side records – sahps app. Etc
- By keeping good records during calving/lambing allows a review later in the season



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Take home messages



- High quality colostrum and good hygiene will avoid a lot of problems
- keeping good records during calving/lambing allows a review later in the season
- Hope for no C-sections but think yourself into what kit you need to do it quickly, cleanly and safely



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Thank You

