

B.A.B.S NEWSFLASH No.15

AUGUST 2009

Hi Everyone,

We should be pleased I suppose that there is not much news about especially on the health front. However it is still early in the year for blue tongue to raise its head again, at least we have managed to get a reasonable run at the show season. There has been a lot of talk from people who do not want to vaccinate again this year. I have vaccinated mine now, but was slightly caught out as last year my vets supplied the Intervet vaccine which could be given to the kids at one month old, this year however they bought the Merel vaccine. It was only when I picked it up I realized it cannot be given to the kids until they are over three months. That took me straight into the shows and I did not want to take a chance and vaccinate too close to their first outings, what with the travelling in the heat etc.

Please note the meeting here is on SUNDAY 16th not 15th!

BREED SHOW

Thank you to those of you who supported the Breed Show this year, we were lucky with the weather and had just enough entries to make the show worth while. A special thank you to Linda Shaw who came all the way down from Scotland. Thank you also for those of you that helped.

STUD LIST

Last chance for you to put your males into the stud list.

Please send any details of males to

Debbie Vernon Westward, Faversham Road, Wychling, Kent ME9 0DH

Tel 01795 886202 email shanvernagoats@googlemail.com

SOCIAL EVENTS

KIDS AND NANNIES

Sunday 16th August from 11am (NB Sunday is the 16th not 15th as previously advertised)

At Stow House, Dauntsey Road, Great Somerford, Wilts. SN15 5HU

General get together, and lunch, please bring contributions, plant sale and baking competition

The proceeds will be shared between BABS and the Gloucestershire Goat Society AND A SPECIAL INVITATION TO ALL YOUNG PEOPLE, children, grandchildren and young helpers.

Please let us know of any youngsters who may be coming and their ages and we will try to arrange some appropriate entertainment for them. Sue Gow 01249 720621 email suegow@hotmail.co.

GOAT VETERINARY SOCIETY NEWS

Nick Clayton and the GVS are currently in consultation with DEFRA, fighting our corner on the subjects of double tagging and also the new ideas re 'Responsability and Cost Sharing', were there are plans afoot to make farmers/ stock keepers foot the bills for health issues, through some sort of insurance scheme. If you are interested in any of these subject look at the GVS website. I have included the July blue tongue report as it is quite interesting and gives some new information about the disease. Also here

is part of the report on the last GVS open meeting held at Leicester racecourse in May;

An update on TB in goats – The next speaker was John Montague of the Defra TB section. He reminded the audience of the outbreak of TB in Golden Guernsey goats in 2008 that had led to an increased interest in the disease that was (and hopefully still is) a rarity in goats. He reminded the audience that the incident was widespread due to the sale of an infected herd before its status was known. A total of 30 reactors were identified on 9 separate premises in England and Wales, if the herd had not been dispersed then this would have been a single incident linked most likely to spread from local wildlife vectors. There have been no new cases reported during 2009 to date.

The Government currently has limited powers to deal with TB in goats under current TB legislation, they have powers to restrict, to test and to slaughter, but there is no compensation policy. There are currently 4 large herds (800 to 2,500 goats) under restriction due to co-location or contact with infected cattle. Each case is assessed by a Defra veterinary officer and the main question is whether infection moved from cattle to goats or vice versa or whether both were infected from a separate common source. There then followed a discussion on the need to develop an approach to TB surveillance in goats in the UK bearing in mind the problems associated with a lack of an exit (for compensation) policy.

FALLEN STOCK

DEFRA need to meet a quota of 500 goats aged over 18 months to be examined for TSEs this year. They have a weekly quota of available spaces as it were, but it remains the case that ALL goats aged over 18 months who die other than for an obvious reason, should be reported to DEFRA who may or may not then accept the animal for investigation.

So far, only 200 deaths have been reported to them this year, rather a large reduction!!, and one which is not unreasonably stretching the DEFRA imagination considerably!!!!.

Please be reminded, or remind your clients of their obligation. ALL fallen goats over 18 months, unless having say a broken leg!!, should be reported to the TSE surveillance helpline on 0800 525890. Goats accepted for surveillance are collected free!!!!.

BLUETONGUE UPDATE August 11th

Bluetongue seems to be getting rather too frequent and too close in France for comfort. There are now 53 premises infected due to circulation of the virus this year. Of those, 46 have BTV8, 4 have BTV1, and three have both at the same time. Two of those are in Normandy, about 12 miles South East of Le Havre. There are no other cases of BTV8 within about 60 miles of the north coast. Movement restrictions for BTV1 are now in place in a cordon of about 50 miles around Le Havre.

Please report ANYTHING suspicious. If BTV1 gets here it may just be possible to stamp it out if we act quickly!!

BLUETONGUE UPDATE July 2nd.

No, Nothing very earth shattering, but I have been yesterday to a Bluetongue workshop organised by Intervet Schering plough with a very international panel of

speakers, so here, rather disjointedly are some of the main points that came out. The whole meeting has been videoed and will be available as a webcast in due course.

VACCINE.

A trial has been carried out in SHEEP where they were given BTV8 vaccine at the same time as Heptavac P, 3 weeks before lambing, and also for another group, 3 and 6 weeks before lambing. In both cases colostral antibody was still strong at 14 weeks of age. Further trials then indicated that vaccination take in lambs is NOT affected by the presence of maternal antibody.

This demonstrates that BTV vaccine can be given at the same time as a clostridial vaccine, and indeed I understand that it is now accepted that in both sheep and cattle a number of vaccines can be used at the same time as BTV8 vaccine without affecting the efficacy of either. I will let you know the full list in due course. However in GOATS the work has not been replicated, and I will take advice from the manufacturers on that point. In the meantime, given the comparatively poor ability of goats to respond to several vaccines, it would seem sensible to follow the not within 2 weeks of another vaccine rule wherever possible until or unless it is proven not to be needed.

Chris Oura from Pirbright, spoke on mechanisms of transmission, including trans placental transmission. One of his points was re importing animals from areas still heavily infected with BTV. His advice is that animals should have been vaccinated, with the vaccination having been completed at least 60 days before the imports are made, AND, just as important, that vaccination of any pregnant animals should have been completed, at least 3 weeks before service. This was particularly important in summer weather when virus replication could overtake the wait for tests.

The new rules introduced by DEFRA are that when animals are imported to the UK, they should have a PCR test within 48 hours of arrival, and another 7 days later to pick up possible cases incubating the disease at the time of test one. There has been a written commons answer on Wednesday to a question by Baroness Byford as to whether the government proposed to ban imports of ruminants from the EU PZ. Lord Davies of Oldham, an area famous for agriculture?, replied on behalf of DEFRA that the risk from importing livestock from other EU states was very low, and there had been no import positives since December 2008. Er, what a surprise, This virus is seasonal M'lud. He went on to say that "We have a robust post import testing regime". Chris, on being asked if the current import policy was sufficient, pointed out that there was still time for midges to bite infected animals before they were blood tested, and before either result became available. That was not entirely to denigrate the dual PCR testing, but in fairness to point out that since that policy came in in March, things have moved on, and I have revised my personal thinking, where at the time I thought the policy WAS a good one, to a feeling that what is needed is a combination of that policy and the vaccination regime Chris thinks should be in place.

When it comes to goats we still have the stumbling block to movement that vaccination in goats is not recognised as there is no caprine MA for any vaccine. What is odd is that the licenses for moving ruminant livestock from within a PZ have suddenly vanished from the DEFRA website. I will follow this up, as without that page, we have no way of guiding anybody anywhere.

One of the reasons for Chris Oura taking his standpoint is that we now know more about transplacental transmission of disease than we did even 3 months ago, and this was backed up by a presentation by Linda van Wuijckhuise from Holland, who has been involved in similar work.

It is now known that embryos whose dams are infected early in pregnancy, tend to be aborted early. Those infected in the last 3 months of pregnancy tend to be unaffected, or relatively so. It is the ones in the middle that are interesting. they can survive to full term, and while some may be stillborn, many will live, but have the condition called hydroanencephaly, where the cerebral hemispheres are replaced by fluid, leaving them as Chris called it, "Intellectually challenged", and as Linda called them, "Dummy calves". They can suck, but not for long, are strong candidates for stomach tubing with colostrum, and then display the characteristics of the bovine equivalent of having in present parlance "Learning Difficulties". I think we can assume that this might apply to lambs and kids as well, but to what extent we do not as yet know.

What seems to be happening is that these calves are born potentially viraemic, and again here read lambs, and probably kids as well. If they get a good feed of colostrum, whether naturally or by stomach tubing, the virus rapidly disappears, and thus the new arrival is NOT a threat to virus circulation in midges in most if not very nearly all cases. The neonatal that might be a threat is the one who failed to get colostrum, and could therefore be inadvertently targetted by midges, for as long as it survived, which can be quite a variable time.

Importantly, if these neonates, infected during pregnancy, receive colostrum, the disease seems not to progress and not to be a threat, other than transiently to causing circulation of virus in the local midge population. It is those few who are born viraemic, and who did NOT receive colostrum, that could potentially lead to virus circulation.

The possible mechanisms for "Overwintering" of virus were discussed, and while transplacental transmission is still an obvious method, the possibility of what might be called virus hibernation in non ruminant species cannot be ruled out. I think that shows that this is a disease where we are still learning fast. It is essential that all involved, including politicians, accept that as we advance scientific frontiers we need to adapt to the implications, whether as Scientists, politicians, AH personell, or even secretaries of the various breed veterinary societies in the UK and elsewhere.

This is a debate which is still open, and another possible mechanism of transmission, Oral transmission, is under investigation.

It was fascinating to hear a presentation from Professor James Machlaclan, who has worked on BTV within the University of California, for 30 years. As he said, in Europe we have had ten incursions of Bluetongue in the last ten years. In the USA they have had TWELVE, albeit mainly in the Gulf, IE Eastern, states. James was asked about eradication, and gave the fascinating opinion that in the USA, where disease had been eradicated on a state by state basis, it was usually when only one strain of BTV was involved. Where two or more strains were involved, it became a lot more difficult. BTV8 seems to be one of the most virulent strains known, especially in cattle.

That situation is very close to us. The French Authorities claim to have had a successful campaign of vaccination during the spring of 2009, but that varies from some reports in the field, which suggest that a lot of farmers have only vaccinated their young stock against BTV8 on the distinctly doubtful principle that the older ones probably immunised themselves last year. It is interesting to note that while the sales of BTV1 vaccine in France appear to be close to the number of livestock that can be targetted, sales of BTV8 vaccine are running at only half of that level, though of course a lot of cattle will only have needed 1 dosed this year rather than two. The main concern seems to be widespread failure to vaccinate sheep again.

Herge Petit, all of about five foot one!, presented the results of a study at Linsitut De elevage in France, on the economic effects on farms affected in France as a result of BTV in 2007. 2008 information is still being collated. Costs such as production loss, deaths, veterinary fees etc were all included in the study, in which he subdivided the herds studied into mildly, moderately, and severely infected, though without stating the details of the criteria. Suffice it to say that he calculated the reduction in gross margin in Dairy units as being 1.1%, 6.6% and 8% respectively. In beef suckler herds these figures rose to 6.1%, 8% and 17.7% respectively. For sheep the effects were dramatic. Only a 4% reduction in mildly affected flocks, but 50% in moderately affected flocks, and 106% in severely affected flocks.

It was interesting to note that a far greater percentage of bulls were affected than cows, but this may have been a statistical quirk of a small sample.. There was a report on fertility in affected rams in Holland in 2007, which is interesting in that affected rams produce substandard sperm after getting the disease, but recover normal production by 60 to 140 days after. That however tends to mean missing a breeding season as the timings work out. We have as yet no figures for bulls, and have to assume that Bucks would behave as rams!!. Some seropositive or PCR positive rams that had shown no outward signs of disease became temporarily infertile.

2009 DISEASE SITUATION

Only reports of disease so far are from France where so far this year there have been 14 holdings positive to BTV8 and 30 to BTV1, though some of those may be surveillance cases picking up a remnant of last year's infection.

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OTHER POINTS. The Q & A sessions

Chris Oura suggested that eradication would only be achieved after a HIGH level uptake of vaccine for at least 3 or 4 years. A level of vaccine below 60% will lead to infection being present for many years. Current uptake in the UK not known, but is apparently higher in the south and east than elsewhere. Weather conditions right for the last week to lead to rapid spread of and multiplication of, BTV, a weather scenario that never really happened here last year.

The number of calves born in France so far this year is 20% lower than at the same time last year. If replicated worldwide that would have huge food security implications.

In Holland, the prevalence of BTV in cattle that were housed all year round was considerably lower than in cattle kept wholly or partly outdoors.

The effectiveness of insecticides was variable. Better in cows than sheep, and better in sheep as a dip than as a spray. Problem in sheep was that the dip will not adhere to the midge feeding areas. At best a mitigation measure, not a control measure.

Keeping dung heaps away from cowshed doors, and grazing areas, was a bigger help in reducing the numbers of midges available to bite cattle.

Thanks To Intervet Schering Plough for organising a very useful update. The underlying theme might be "We know a lot more than we did, but not as much as we would like to".

Further changes in policy and recommendations on various aspects of BTV control are inevitable.

Nick Clayton.