May 2015:

Who would have thought that we would be praying for rain in May. Unfortunately with the dry ground and cold mornings the grass is still not growing very well.

In the sheep we are seeing a lot of orf, with some very nasty outbreaks on the mouth and udders.

- We wonder whether the lack of grass means that the ewes are not producing as much milk. This means that the teats are being butted and damaged more allowing orf to enter the skin of the ewe.
- The lambs are still hungry so they are eating grass and foraging, this in turn damages the gums allowing orf to enter the mouth and proliferate.
- In an outbreak we recommend supportive care such as a long acting antibiotic to control secondary infection, some pain relief to keep the animals eating and blue spray to dry the orf out. Scabivax will go some way to preventing infection but unfortunately not all vaccines are 100% and so cases can still occur. Please **speak to us if you are worried**.

In the sheep we are also seeing nematodirus and high worm counts.

- Bring us those poo samples to check that your lambs are not infected.
- There is a meeting on Wed 6th May at 2pm in the WLS, which is on the amount of wormer resistance in Wales. Unfortunately in a recent survey there was a depressing amount of wormer resistance diagnosed.
- We do need to try and reduce the number of doses used in appropriately as we could soon be in stuck. Cheery news eh!

In the cattle we are seeing a surprising amount of calving problems.

- Not only big calves, which we assume from the excellent nutrition / forage which was fed over the winter, but also in correctly presented calves such as twists.
- Twists can be difficult to spot as the cow starts calving then simply stops. You can think that she is simply not ready but unfortunately it is that she just can't pass out the calf as the uterus is twisted.

With people coming to the end of clamps we are seeing a few scouring cows and resorptions of the foetus.

- Unfortunately feeding mouldy forage is not cost effective and the cost of rectifying the problem far outweighs the savings on forage. On one farm it has led to an outbreak of LDAs.

E coli in calves. Again the hospital calf pens have been very full over the last month.

- Worryingly when we have taken scour samples and sent them off we have found a high proportion of antibiotic resistance, with only a couple of antibiotics being effective.
- This highlights the importance of only sparingly using antibiotics at birth. The key to reducing scours is feeding excellent colostrum, keeping the calving pens and new born areas as clean as humanly possible and using either vaccination against e.coli / rotavirus etc in the form of rotavec.
- There is an excellent product called locatim which can be dosed at birth and provides the calf with antibodies to e coli.
- We need to check the BVD and mineral status of affected herds.
- If you see scour don't automatically use antibiotics, many simply need rehydration ie effydral and after a few days if not stiffening up try some recofast which stiffens the faeces up.

Give us a call to check your bulls before they are used for serving. The cost will be insignificant compared with the amount of money you could lose.

We physically examine the bulls to make sure there are no obvious defects. We will also assess their sperm; in order to collect this we will use an electro-ejaculator. This stimulates nerves that cause ejaculation. The male tolerates it perfectly well.

A situation I have dealt with was on a 50 cow suckler herd. At the routine pregnancy diagnosis check 3 months after the bull had been removed all the cattle were found to be negative this was in spite of the farmer seeing the bull mounting.

On examining the bull he was infertile and so the farmer had to hire in a bull.

This resulted in the farmer losing 6 months on his calving period which amounted to a loss of income of £9763 for the herd which was £195 per cow. This did not take into account the feed, the labour costs, vet and med etc and of course the disease bought in by the hire bull. In the current state of farming can you afford these losses??

Likewise in a dairy herd of 200 cattle the farmer reported an increased calving interval from 400 – 420 over the last 12 months. He suspected one of his bulls to be infertile, however they were both Simmentals so he was unable to pin point exactly which bull was the problem. On examination of these bulls it was determined that the five year old bull had never been capable of serving.

It has been calculated that for everyday a cow goes over the optimum calving interval, the farmer losses £5.00 per day (Esslemont 1997). This meant in this situation the farmer had lost £20,000; this does not include the price of rearing and keeping a bull at £1565 per year (Lowman 2003) and so the total cost was £21,565. At the current milk prices, this equates to producing an extra 86,260 litres of milk!!