



## CoombeField Farm Department Sheep Newsletter May 2017



### Keep enzootic abortion out of your flock

#### What is enzootic abortion?

Abortion continues to be a major worry during the lambing season. There are many causes but the most common is enzootic abortion, which is the result of infection by the bacteria *Chlamydophila abortus*. Around half of the 400,000 infectious abortions in sheep each year are estimated to be from enzootic abortion. Typical abortion storms average 13% losses but figures can reach 50%, which can have a dramatic practical and economic impact on your business.

#### What does it do?

Enzootic abortion causes abortion of dead or very weak lambs in late pregnancy. The infected afterbirth and vaginal discharges are highly contagious and spread the infection very rapidly round the rest of the flock. However, the infection will often lay latent after initial contraction and remerge in the next pregnancy, causing abortion the following year. Ewes are often well in themselves at the time of abortion and will develop an immunity to it in the future. This bacteria can also be contagious to people. Care must be taken when handling aborted sheep and material. The bacteria can remain in the environment for around six weeks.

#### How does infection happen?

The major reason for infection is simply because many sheep are not vaccinated. If your flock is genuinely closed and enzootic-free this may be justified. However, there is still a biosecurity risk from animals transferring infected material from next door. Having the odd abortion is often accepted by shepherds but if more than 2-3% of the flock are aborting it is likely that the problem will escalate in subsequent years. When you buy in replacement stock you can't guarantee their disease status unless they are blood tested. The trouble is that the blood test can't distinguish between vaccinated or infected status. The safest bet is to buy from a reputable source and unless proof of vaccination is available immediately, have new stock vaccinated.

#### How can I stop the spread of infection?

Control measures have to be put into place immediately in the face of an outbreak of enzootic abortion. Post mortems of aborted lambs and their placentae are vital to get a definite diagnosis. Aborted ewes need to be isolated. Afterbirths and bedding they have been in contact with must be removed and destroyed and the area disinfected thoroughly. Treatment of ewes with a long-acting oxytetracycline in the face of an outbreak can help reduce the incidence of abortion but this will not reverse any damage already done in the uterus. It may delay the abortion until the ewe is nearer term, is producing more milk and can foster a lamb. However, any lambs reared on a ewe that has aborted, must not be kept as replacements.

#### How can I avoid the problem in the first place?

Prevention is by far the most effective way to control enzootic abortion and a specific vaccination is widely available. It cannot be given to ewes during pregnancy so the usual protocol is for sheep to be vaccinated one or two months prior to tupping, which needs to be planned during the summer. It is worth considering that lambs can actually be vaccinated from five months of age, which has the advantage of reducing the risk of disease to followers over the spring and summer months. It also means you will have one less job to deal with before the tups go in during the autumn.

It is recommended that the whole flock should be vaccinated in the first year and all replacement stock in subsequent years. At CoombeField we have had great success with flocks that have used the vaccine.

Even if there are no signs of abortion in your flock you could still be at risk. Ceva Animal Health (manufacturers of Cevac Chlamydia), the no 1 vaccine for enzootic abortion, are running "Assure Ewe", a subsidised enzootic abortion blood testing programme which allows you to monitor and prevent enzootic abortion in your flock whether you've experienced abortions or not. Please give us a call on 01297 630515 if you would like to take advantage of this.





Name .....

Tel .....

Email .....

1. Have you ever had enzootic abortion diagnosed?

- No
- Yes

2. Do you vaccinate against enzootic abortion?

- No
- Yes
  - Anything I buy in
  - All ewes
  - Closed Flock

3. Do you buy in breeding replacements?

- No
- Yes, from accredited flocks
  - Ewes
  - Hoggs
  - Glimmers

4. How good is your biosecurity?

Share common boundaries with other flocks?

Fencing?

Stock Proof?

Isolate purchased breeding females (if bought)?

Restrict entry of people/vehicles?

5. How do you manage ewes that abort?

- Keep strictly isolated
- Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_



[www.facebook.com/coombefieldfarmdepartment](http://www.facebook.com/coombefieldfarmdepartment)

**FARM DEPARTMENT INFORMATION**

If you would like to speak to a Farm vet or arrange a visit, **please call 01297 630515**

Medicines can be requested via email or by telephone

Email: [farm@axvets.co.uk](mailto:farm@axvets.co.uk)