Thank you to all that attended our farm meetings in November

The suckler cow nutrition meeting earlier last month focused on cow body condition scoring and silage analysis to help with feed budgeting. Key points were that thin or fat cows need to be identified and managed now, rather than waiting until closer to calving. Inevitably, if they are left with the main group the fat ones will get fatter and the thin cows thinner! SAC have issued a warning for low protein in silages. This can mean the rumen bugs have insufficient protein to function and therefore the rumen shuts down causing death due to rumen impaction. This is compounded if straw is mixed with already low protein silage. Analysing silage sooner rather than later is strongly encouraged.

The second meeting focused on the hot topic of homebred replacement heifers vs buying in. When breeding your own replacements there are many considerations; genetics, bull choice, age, disease status, pelvic size etc. Key points were - synchronisation and AI of cows to breed replacements is a feasible option without having to buy a bull just for heifers. Veterinary examination pre breeding can eliminate non breeders and heifers with abnormally small pelvises.

TB testing
TB testing is in full swing; please try to give us plenty of notice if you require a TB test this winter. We are now required to TB test any female cattle over 6 weeks old that aren’t going directly to slaughter. Tests are therefore taking longer than usual. We are more than happy to carry out PD’s, pre breeding checks, BVD and Johne’s testing at TB tests if you let us know in advance.

Productivity profiles
6-8 weeks pre lambing or calving is a good time for an annual MOT. Blood sampling 5 animals from a group and testing them for trace elements, protein and energy levels, liver health and magnesium allows for any abnormalities to be corrected well in advance of calving and lambing.

Pneumonia in calves
At usual at this time of year we have had outbreaks of pneumonia in autumn and spring born calves. In most cases, mortality rates have been low and sick calves have responded to antibiotics. Vaccines should be considered to prevent problems next year. With the wide choice of pneumonia vaccines on the market it helps to know what viruses and bacteria are causing the problems so we can advise on the correct vaccine to use. There are several ways of doing this -

1. At the time of the outbreak we can take nasal swabs for virus and bacterial testing. These need to be calves that have just become ill and not yet treated with antibiotics.
2. If you are unfortunate enough to have a calf die from pneumonia then samples can be taken from a fresh carcass to reach a diagnosis.
3. We can investigate an outbreak that happened over 4 weeks ago by taking blood samples from the calves that were affected. This can only be done in calves over 4 months of age otherwise antibodies from the colostrum of the cows interfere with the testing.

Please ring for advice rather than tackling an outbreak alone. Much has changed in terms of pneumonia prevention, management and treatment in recent years.

MAG-NET Project Survey
Nottingham University is running a project looking to better understand the current incidence, prevention and treatment of staggers in the UK. They aim to use the data collected to develop a decision tool allowing farmers to improve forage nutrient management on farm to help prevent the disease. They would like as many people as possible to complete the survey – whether you have had issues with staggers or not. It only takes a couple of minutes and you will find it here - www.magnesium-network.uk/survey.html

Free workshop - Farming Advice Service
You are invited to a FREE evening meeting, for livestock keepers in the North East. The event will explain the new CPH 10-mile rule, cover the cross compliance requirements for livestock farms, focus on explaining common areas of non-compliance to reduce your risk of inspection penalties, and introduce the BVD Free England Campaign. This will be held at Hexham Mart, 7.30 – 9.30pm on Tuesday 13th December 2016. Places must be booked for this meeting.

Finally…
Join us for mince pies in the farm reception on the lead up to Christmas.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from all of us.