MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Trace Element Deficiency in Weaned Lambs

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Trace elements are absolutely crucial to ensuring maximum growth and productivity from weaned lambs. With weather patterns becoming more variable, this can have an impact on the nutritional value of grazing land and trace element intake. Ill thrift in growing lambs, caused by a lack of trace elements, is costly due to increased feeding, medicine, veterinary costs, and higher mortality rates.

In some cases, trace element deficiencies can have obvious clinical signs, but sometimes they are very subtle, and when signs do show, the damage may already have been done.

The main trace elements are cobalt, copper, iodine and selenium, all of which are crucial for lambs and sheep to thrive.

Cobalt

Cobalt is one of the most important trace elements in weaned lambs and is essential for growth. It's required for the production of vitamin B12, which helps in the process of breaking down feed. Sheep are poor at storing cobalt, so it is important to ensure there is a constant input through the diet or supplementation. Signs of cobalt deficiency include poor-quality wool with an open fleece, reduced growth rates, lethargy, and a low appetite.

Copper

Copper is vital for immune function and is also a key component in enzymes, which are needed for connective tissue and growth. Lack of copper can cause irreparable damage and increase disease risk. Care must be taken when supplementing copper, as sheep are very susceptible to copper poisoning. It's always advised to have proof of copper deficiency and consult with your vet before supplementing. Signs of copper deficiency in weaned lambs are very subtle but include wool that has lost its natural crimp.

Selenium + Vitamin E

Selenium and vitamin E are both antioxidants which protect cells from damage. Selenium also plays a critical role in the immune system. Lack of these antioxidants can cause white muscle disease in young animals, as well as having effects on the fertility of breeding animals.

Iodine

Iodine is required for the production of thyroid hormones, which are used in energy metabolism. Signs of iodine deficiency include an enlarged thyroid (goitre), but often, there can be no obvious signs apart from reduced growth rates.

Diagnosis of a trace element deficiency

Diagnosis of deficiencies is made by blood sampling 6-10 animals in the affected group. It's important to understand that blood sampling only shows the trace element levels at the current time. Therefore, animals should be sampled 3-4 weeks before the associated risk period. E.g weaning.

Treatment/prevention

There are multiple methods of providing supplementary trace elements to sheep and lambs. Drenches can be an effective short-term method of supplementation, but will only be effective if the lambs are dosed every 3-4 weeks. Boluses are another option for supplementation and last up to 6 months. Lick tubs / free access minerals have varied uptake, so are not recommended when there is a known deficiency, as the appropriate intake can't be guaranteed.

BIGGAR SHOW!

We were at Biggar Show in July and it was a fantastic day... right until the heavens opened! The team braved the typical Scottish summer weather, and we're so grateful to everyone who stopped by to say hello (or to shelter under our tent!).

Despite the downpour, it was great to catch up with so many of our clients and meet new faces too. Our next stop is Strathaven Show in September!