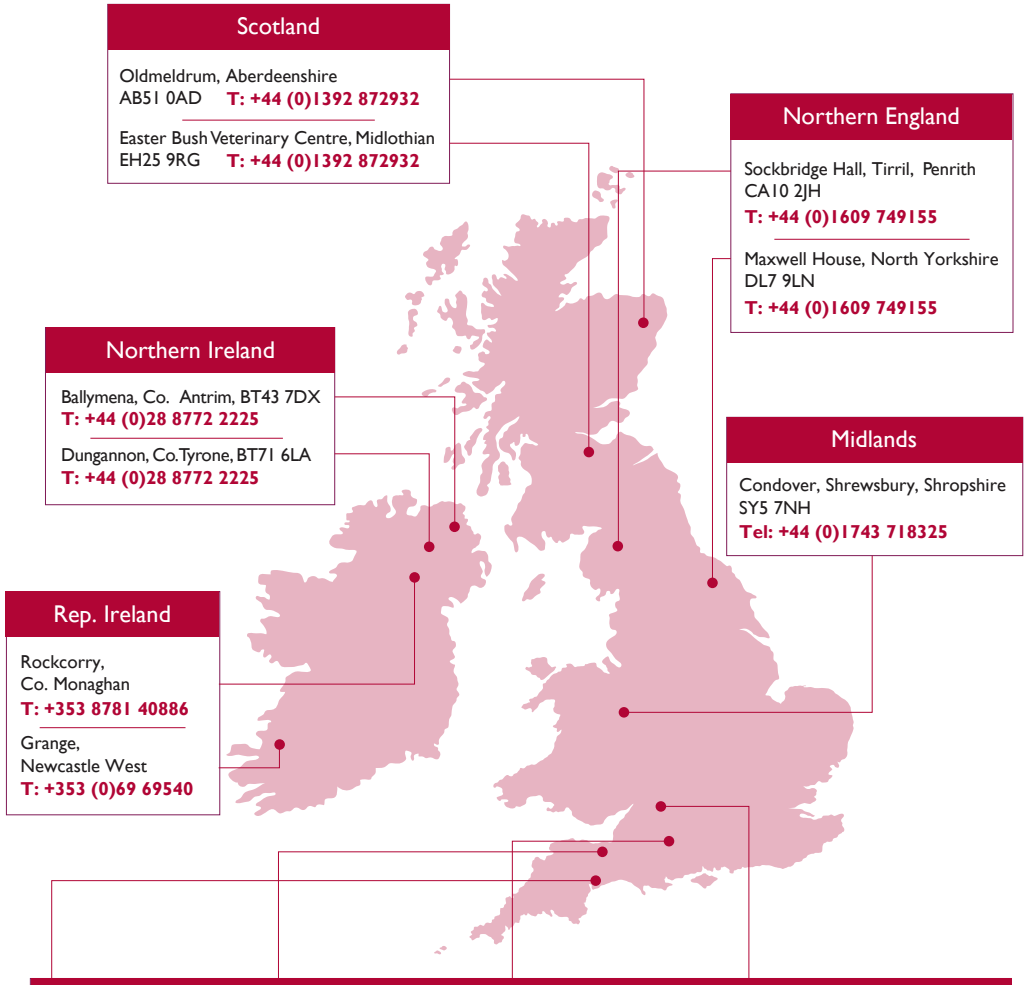

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ST DAVID'S POULTRY TEAM

VETERINARY SURGEONS

Layer Newsletter

New Requirements for Accreditation Bodies by Richard Turner MA Vet MB MRCVS

As you will no doubt been aware, there have been changes to the Lion Code requirements on monitoring antibiotic usage. Across all sectors of the industry, there is now a much greater focus on antibiotics and whilst the layer industry is a very low user of these products, we are now being asked to monitor their use more closely. The debate on antibiotic resistance continues and the issue is now becoming serious, with very few new antibiotics for human use. The level of resistance in hospitals is a great concern and the focus is also on animal use. Bacterial resistance to antibiotics is transmitted in a variety of ways and it is now recognised that even bacteria in the soil can be carriers of some resistance genes. For many years, we had few antibiotics with a zero egg withdrawal to choose from and even now, the number can be counted on one hand. The main usage, as with broilers, is for gut health issues and possibly E.coli infections. Over the last five years, we have been trialling a range of non-antibiotic solutions to these challenges including short chain fatty acids, essential oils and probiotics. We call this approach ABC (Applied Bacterial Control).

The products are usually individually weaker in their affect than antibiotics and often require to be used together in various mixtures. Clean water and attention to sources of infection or focusing on the reason for the original intestinal bacterial disturbance are very important first steps, and the use of the new live E.coli vaccine has proven very useful on some farms. We are working with a major supplement manufacturer to develop in-feed products which will alter the gut flora, improve intestinal health and improve shell quality. These products are now under trial, although they are well known individually and used extensively elsewhere in the world.

There are over 10 times as many bacteria in the bird's body as there are birds animal cells; this massive colony is called the bacterial Microbiome and is now regarded as an organ in itself. It can be damaged, repaired and destroyed, with serious consequences. We have become used to using antibiotics to treat frothy droppings and egg drops but in many cases, this is just a reflection of a disturbed Microbiome and we need to find out what has caused the change and then support its recovery, and try to prevent it happening again. In some cases, the broad action of antibiotic treatment has deleterious side effects on the normal commensal bacteria which allows reinfection to occur. Only recently has the effect of antibiotics on the normal gut flora been better understood, and we should do all we can to minimise usage.

Therefore, back to the Lion Code! There is a requirement from some egg packers to have records of antibiotic usage and we cannot supply this without your express written permission for confidentiality reasons. All prescriptions are on our online system which you can log onto with your own password. Many of our clients use this system already to view lab reports, visit reports and copies of salmonella tests etc. You can also interrogate the system and download a list of antibiotics prescribed on your farm over any specific period. We would much prefer this system to be used by our clients to supply data to your own packer rather than we did it as we often don't know who packs your eggs. If you don't have a login for this system or you cannot get the answer you need, please contact the office for assistance. In the meantime, if antibiotic usage is high on your farm, we should visit and review what is happening.

Datasheets

All datasheets for our products can be found on our website which you will require for auditing purposes.

Maintaining Egg Shell Quality by Richard Jackson BVMS (Hons) MRCVS

Across the globe, on average 7% of eggs laid are sold as 'seconds' due to shell quality issues. As we ask for more eggs from our flocks and expect them to lay for longer, maintaining egg shell quality become even more important. Once an egg yolk is released from the ovary, it takes approximately 24 hours for the albumen, shell membranes and the shell to form. Of this 24 hour period, approximately 19.5 hours are spent forming the shell. Most of the shell is formed during the dark period when the hen is asleep. Each hen's egg contains 2-4g of calcium. The total amount of calcium in a hen's skeleton is 40g. Thankfully for the hen, almost all of this calcium comes from her diet rather than her skeleton otherwise after ten days of laying she'd have very weak bones.

Factors influencing egg shell quality

Age: As hens' age, their egg size increases. Birds tend to produce the same amount of shell whether the egg is large or small, hence older hens tend to have thinner egg shells. Worms can reduce the intestinal uptake of calcium causing poor shell quality.

Disease: Diseases such as Mycoplasma or Infectious Bronchitis (IB) infect the reproductive tracts of chickens, leading to deformed shell membranes and subsequently, deformed shells.

Stress: Stress can have a negative effect on shell quality. This stress can take the form of moving the birds, changing their routine or a sudden fright such as a fox or badger entering the shed.

Nutrition: Modern layer diets are often complete and contain sufficient calcium or egg production. However, if a flock has had a disease challenge or are producing very well then their intestines can struggle to cope.

What can I do as a producer?

Minimise disease - make sure that you know the IB and Mycoplasma status of your farm. If either disease is an issue we can alter your birds' vaccination program to offer additional protection. Ensure that your flock are either routinely wormed or sampled for worms.

Minimise stress - try to stick to the same routine and ensure that predators are kept at bay.
Ensure that you have regular contact with your Feed Rep to make certain that your birds are on the correct ration for their stage in production.

Give the birds' crushed oyster shell to provide extra calcium - don't overdo it!

Give the birds' regular Vitamin D in their drinking water (1 or 2 days per week). Vitamin D will improve the bird's ability to absorb calcium from the gut. More information on Vitamin D is in the enclosed product leaflet.

If you have any concerns regarding egg shell quality please do not hesitate to contact us.

WCLA

The recent spring conference held by West Country Layers Association (WCLA) at Exeter Racecourse was well supported by producers and trade alike. The speakers focused on the health benefits of eggs and the various diversifications taking place in the egg sector in both whole and liquid egg. If you would like to be on the mailing list for WCLA events please contact Alison Colville-Hyde **alisonch@stdavids-vets.co.uk** or **077769710855**.