



## Welcome to Ruminant Health & Welfare

Welcome to the latest issue of the RH&W newsletter.

As we enter autumn, it's impossible to not reflect on the challenging few months many have faced over the summer. The tragic events in Ukraine continue to impact fuel and grain prices and record-breaking droughts saw fields of crops impacted across the UK and livestock struggling to cope. In addition, the current cost-of-living crisis is significantly impacting people from all backgrounds and unfortunately looks like it's here to stay. For those in farming, it's adding yet another pressure to an already stressful landscape.

Despite these pressures it's vital our community continues to look ahead at how we can improve the health and welfare of ruminants up and down the four nations. With a number of changes to legislation and the introduction of the welfare pathways in England hopefully on the horizon, now is a crucial time to look at how we can make improvements to animal welfare and ensure we continue to prioritise ruminant health.

As ever, please do get in touch with your thoughts or feedback via [secretary@ruminanthw.org.uk](mailto:secretary@ruminanthw.org.uk)

With best wishes,

Nigel Miller  
Chair, RH&W

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### **Focus on welfare**

Recently RH&W has been working with vets, farmers and industry stakeholders on how ruminant welfare can continue to be enhanced and build upon the foundations set out by the assurance schemes and bodies who inspect farmers, ensuring they are compliant with animal welfare legislation but also driving positive welfare across the industry. Today's consumers require more transparency on how their food is produced and how animals are cared for on farms. There is a continued need to reassure consumers and increase their confidence in animal production practices. As we review our present practices any changes must be centred on the best interests of the animal and be supported by science. While health and welfare are both very much aligned, there is recognition that many wins in welfare will also deliver health benefits.

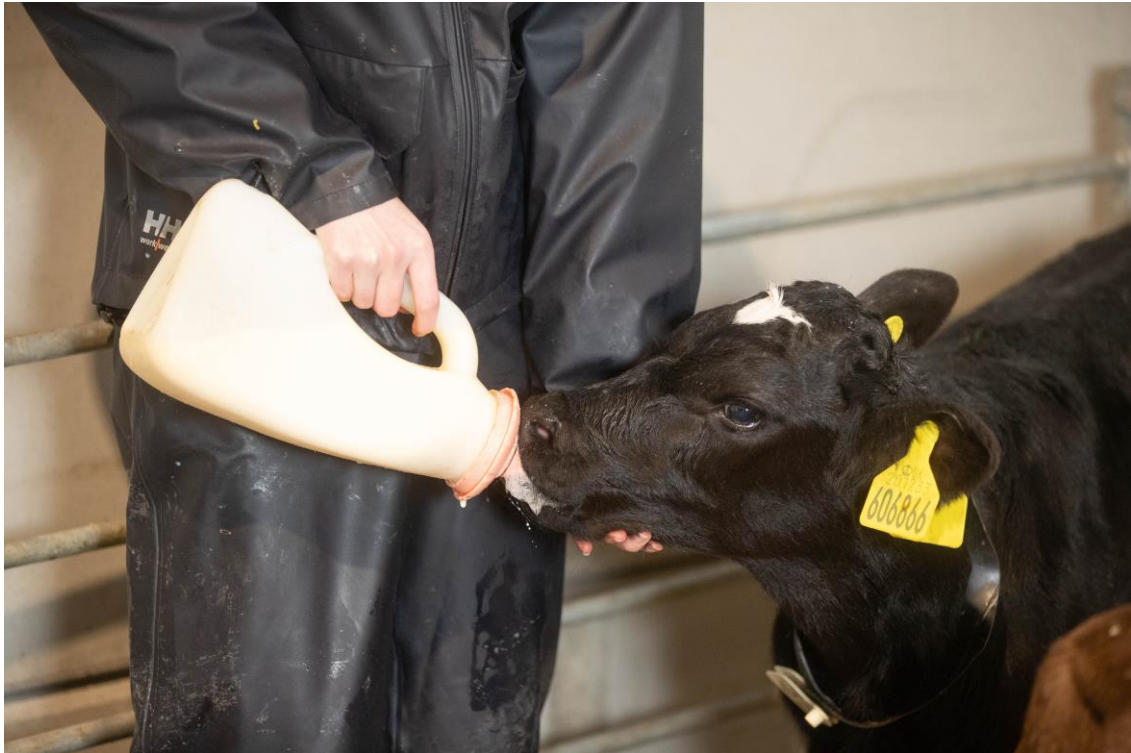
With this in mind, these strategies call for individuals right across the ruminant sector to understand and accept the duty they have to provide a high standard of welfare for the livestock in their care. While health and welfare are both very much aligned, there is recognition that many wins in welfare will also deliver health benefits.

This work will include current issues and challenges facing our industry as well as looking to the future. Our starting point has been to set a vision for the future of ruminant welfare that all stakeholders – farmers, vets, those working with ruminants daily and industry stakeholders - can get behind and support.

The new higher ambitions we propose to set out in welfare strategies for the beef, dairy and beef sectors will facilitate dialogue, enhance co-operation and improve welfare in a wide variety of situations. We plan to launch a strategy for the dairy sector in early 2023 and will keep you updated on our progress.

**Why not join the conversation on Twitter? Follow and tag us @ruminanthw**

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### **Once-a-day calf feeding**

Since reiterating the legal requirement for providing calves with at least two milk feeds a day until 28 days of age, there has been significant engagement across the industry from suppliers to government.

The reminder from the RH&W steering group came at a time of severe cost pressure in the sector, which led to debate on social media about whether farmers can switch to once-a-day feeding of milk to calves in the first 28 days of their life.

We reminded all dairy farmers and calf rearers that in the first month of life, a calf must be fed two liquid feeds a day until the rumen is sufficiently developed (at around 28 days) in order to enable fibrous food to be digested and offer sufficient nutrition moving forwards.

Full information is available on the [website](#), [The Scottish Farmer](#) and [Farmers Guide](#)

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### **NOAH Livestock Vaccination Guideline**

We have welcomed the focus placed on livestock vaccination as an integral part of herd and flock health management following the launch of NOAH's campaign to promote the Livestock Vaccination Guideline.

The group believes vaccination is key - along with good management, husbandry, nutrition and biosecurity - in preventing and controlling endemic diseases.

The NOAH Livestock Vaccination Guideline demonstrates the current thinking for a proactive approach to vaccination.

As a resource for the industry, the Guideline provides information to support herd and flock health planning discussions and on-farm decision making, recommending the diseases to manage, and vaccines available.

There are dairy, beef and sheep sector specific on-farm guides available about the priority diseases and recommended category one vaccines.

To learn more, read our [full RH&W statement](#) and download the [NOAH Livestock Vaccination Guideline](#).

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### **Schmallenberg survey update**

With the support of UK vet colleges, we worked with members - including the National Sheep Association (NSA), Sheep Veterinary Society (SVS) and the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) - to identify whether Schmallenberg Virus (SBV) has impacted the 2022 lambing season. This was done through a student and host farm led survey of foetal lamb deformities identified during on-farm lambing placements across the country.

Malformations were identified in several flocks and post-mortem investigation confirmed Schmallenberg as the cause of one incident. This is one of 27 cases of SBV diagnosed this year by APHA, in comparison to nine in 2021.

Other diagnoses from the 102 tests carried out by APHA included toxoplasmosis, hypoglycaemic injury, campylobacter, chlamydia, salmonella and yersinia. In some cases, ewe bloods were taken, and these results are in the process of being correlated with those of the lamb submissions.

RH&W is keen to build on the data from [this initial survey](#) and continue work across the vet colleges to help develop the next generation of farm vets.

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### **Take precautions this season to prevent botulism impacting your herd**

After soaring fertiliser prices led to an increase in the use of poultry litter on grass crops, we are reminding farmers of the potential risk of botulism caused by this practice.

The warning comes after reports emerged of animals being affected by botulism already this season.

If poultry litter is applied or stored on your own or on neighbouring fields assess the risk that grass on grazing or cutting areas might be contaminated; if you have concerns involve your farm vet in formulating a risk reduction strategy.

When grazing or silage is contaminated the botulinum toxin affects muscle function causing progressive paralysis, the severity of the impact being dose dependent. Any early signs require action to avoid further intakes of contaminated forage and immediate veterinary support.

If you suspect botulism has entered your herd or flock, you should contact your veterinary surgeon immediately. It is also important to isolate any suspected contaminated livestock from the main group and contain them in alternative housing or grazing as soon as possible.

Full information is available on the [website](#), [Farmers Guardian](#) and [Farmers Guide](#)

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### **Call for evidence on methane-reducing feed products**

The UK Government has issued a call for evidence from farmers, scientists and agricultural industry professionals on the use of special feed products to reduce emissions from livestock.

The UK-wide consultation, which runs until 15 November, will assess the current role of feed additives with the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and any potential barriers to farmers using them both now and in the future. This includes produces with ingredients such as methane production inhibitors, seaweeds, essential oils, organic acids, probiotics and antimicrobials.

The consultation is online [here](#).

### **Bluetongue surveillance in cattle**

In recent years Bluetongue virus (BTV) has spread through much of western Europe. It has been found in France, Germany, Switzerland and Belgium; the nearest countries to the UK currently under BTV restrictions. Therefore, it is more important than ever that APHA undertakes an annual bluetongue survey, which complements their passive surveillance programme, and demonstrate to trading partners that we remain bluetongue-free.

A survey will sample cattle in areas which are considered at greatest risk of infection, due to their relative proximity to the nearest countries to the UK under BTV restrictions. At present the aim is to recruit farms from across each of these areas:

- 6 farms in each of the counties:
  - East Sussex
  - West Sussex
  - Dorset
- 12 farms in each of the counties:
  - Hampshire (including the Isle of Wight)
  - Essex
  - Kent

Sampling is planned to take place at the end of the vector season, from November to December 2022.

If you would like further information or to participate in the survey please contact: Christina

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### **GB Calf Week**

A series of 30 plus events will take place next month as part of GB Calf Week, which runs from 16-23 November.

The initiative run by AHDB and the NFU and supported by the industry aims to ensure all dairy-bred calves are reared with care and for a purpose in either the dairy or beef supply chains.

The events will kick off at AgriScot at Ingliston, near Edinburgh, and end at Total Dairy at Stratford-upon-Avon. Information about all the events – including webinars, podcasts and face-to-face meetings – is available [here](#).

### **Reminder to stay vigilant for signs of lungworm in cattle**

APHA and SRUC would like to raise awareness of some potential issues of grazing cattle in late summer and autumn 2022. In particular, farmers are warned to remain vigilant for signs of lungworm in cattle following reports of coughing in grazing cattle, consistent with lungworm infection.

Outbreaks can be difficult to predict, meaning pasture contamination can build up. This year could be particularly challenging as the drought suspended lungworm life cycles, and this could now result in a greater infection pressure in a short space of time. With autumn now bringing wetter weather, rainfall can promote the release of infective larvae from faecal pats.

If you are seeing coughing cattle, do speak to your vet about the best means to diagnose and treat disease. Early diagnosis and treatment are very important.

When treatment for lungworm is indicated remember the five Rs for effective use of wormers

- the right product for the type of worm
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- the right animal
- the right time
- the right dose-rate
- administered in the right way

Further information can be found on the COWs website <https://www.cattleparasites.org.uk/>

In addition, livestock and wildlife health and welfare and production problems may arise during and following periods of hot weather. Examples are listed [at this link](#) to raise awareness.

### **Methane report reminder**

The 'Acting on methane' report is a great source of information for having conversations about emissions from ruminants. It discusses how we can reduce the carbon intensity of production, and in turn emissions, by focussing on conditions which impact food conversion efficiency, growth rates and the involuntary or premature culling of breeding stock.

You can find the full report [here](#).

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