



Welcome to Ruminant Health & Welfare

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

I am delighted to be writing this month's edition of the RH&W newsletter as the newly elected chair of the group.

It has been an incredibly busy start to my tenure, working with the group to galvanise the sector together, discussing a concerning emerging threat to UK ruminants in the shape of the newly reported bluetongue virus BTV-3 spreading at pace across Europe. RH&W is proud to unite and facilitate the industry in raising awareness of this and we will strive to continue regular and factual updates to both farmers and veterinary professionals.

Alongside this, with the support of a working group and the wider steering group, we are driving forward with the development of the UK Sheep Welfare strategy which will be launched next month. This currently has 97 organisations across the sector supporting it and will hopefully ignite wider support as it is rolled out over the next few months.

Keep an eye on the [RH&W social page](#) and [website](#) for the launch of the strategy and how everyone across the supply chain can get involved.

As ever, please do get in touch with your thoughts or feedback via RuminantHW@ahdb.org.uk.

With best wishes,

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Gwyn Jones

Chair

RH&W

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RH&W introduces new chair

Ruminant Health and Welfare (RH&W) is pleased to announce the appointment of Gwyn Jones as the new chair.

Following a formal recruitment and selection process, Gwyn has been chosen to chair the four-nations, cross industry group for the next two years.

With over 30 years of experience and contacts in agriculture, from dairy farming through to policy lobbying, Gwyn brings a breadth of knowledge to the role, taking over from Nigel Miller, who stepped down early this year.

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

Bluetongue update



Following reports of a new strain of bluetongue virus (BTV-3) emerging and spreading rapidly in the Netherlands, Belgium and more recently Germany, there is increasing concern about the situation and its proximity to the UK.

RH&W facilitated emergency meetings earlier this month, bringing together over 40 key stakeholders and representatives from across the industry, to ensure the four nations are prepared for this emerging disease threat.

BTV-3 is a viral disease transmitted by biting midges, which affects all ruminants (e.g. sheep, cattle, goats and deer) and camelids (e.g. llama and alpaca). It can also be spread by movement of infected animals.

RH&W's advice to farmers and their vets remains three-fold, farmers need to beware when buying animals in, take action to report any signs, and always, remain vigilant:

- **Buyer beware**, only source animals responsibly and enforce import testing.
- **Take action**, prioritise biosecurity and report any suspicious clinical signs.
- **Vigilance is key**, monitor livestock closely.

In the UK, bluetongue, including BTV-3, is a notifiable disease, so anyone suspecting the disease must take action and report it to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).

Further information and resources can be found [here](#).

#SheepHealthWeek

To celebrate the fantastic work done for flock health by UK sheep farmers, the National Sheep Association is hosting #SheepHealthWeek. This weeklong celebration will incorporate a range of social media, free to attend webinars and the inaugural NSA Sheep Farmer conference (25 October).

By taking to social media and using the hashtag #SheepHealthWeek, the industry can showcase the great work being done by farmers to implement positive welfare standards. Follow @natsheep on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use the hashtag #SheepHealthWeek to show your support and involvement in ongoing positive health and welfare for the sheep sector.

During the week, Sheep Health, Wealth and Production (SHWAP) are planning three free-to-attend evening online webinars, sponsored by MSD and Elanco. The educational and informative webinars will cover the following topics:

- **Monday 23 Oct** - Independent sheep consultant Lesley Stubbings and veterinary surgeon JP Crilly, will look at improving flock efficiency.
- **Tuesday 24 Oct** – A panel of farmer and expert advisers share their experiences on 'Measuring to manage'; the use of stock records and forage production data to monitor physical and financial performance
- **Thursday 26 Oct** – Sam Lane, Cotswold Seeds Ltd technical manager, and Kate Phillips, an independent sheep consultant, look at building annual feed budgets, based on grazing, forage, cover crops and conserved forage

Finally, the inaugural Sheep Farmers Conference will take place on Wednesday 25 October at the National Conference Centre and will focus on sheep health and the links to sustainability, production and welfare.

To find out more about the #SheepHealthWeek or book to attend any of the events visit, <https://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SHWAP/>.



New annual vet visit requirement for EU-bound livestock producers

Starting on 13 December 2023, any products of animal origin (POAP) exported to the EU must come from a farm that can evidence an annual vet visit. This is to check for notifiable diseases and biosecurity risks.

Farms that are assured e.g. Red Tractor, QMS, and FAWL are already compliant and veterinary assurance visits can be used for this purpose. During these vet visits, a 'Vet Attestation Number' (VAN) will be issued, which should be noted on the Food Chain Information document for slaughter.

Defra is developing digital VAN recording solutions, especially for pig keepers. Non-compliant producers should consult their vets or local abattoirs for guidance. Detailed Q&A documents are being circulated industry wide.

Some farms are not aware that some parts of the carcass are destined to go to EU (for example offal) and there is a risk that farmers may not think this legislation applies to them.

Find out more [here](#).

Methane report reminder

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

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

UHF EID tagging could be the next revolution for the livestock sector

The Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers (IAAS) have raised their support of ultra-high frequency (UHF) electronic tagging as a game-changer for livestock farming.

According to IAAS president, Alan Hutcheon, and Under Secretary of State for Scotland, John Lamont, UHF EID tags could streamline cattle movement tracking while improving supply chain efficiency and traceability.

The technology is also believed to be able to reduce administrative tasks, bolster animal welfare and heighten staff safety, potentially simplifying export protocols and aiding in disease control. ANM Group is collaborating with ScotEID to run trials which have shown notable benefits.

Many stakeholders believe this move for the livestock sector could potentially save tens of thousands of pounds spent on paper passports annually. However, this move will require support from the Scottish Government in order to bring the aims into reality.

To learn more about EID tagging visit: <https://www.fas.scot/livestock/beef-cattle/record-keeping/cattle-eid/>

Implication of castration and tail docking of lambs



The UK Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) have recently released, via the Scottish and Welsh Government website, a review of the welfare concerns around tail docking and castration of lambs.

Part of the strategy highlights the need for unification across the four nations which is something many within the RH&W steering group have been pushing towards for quite some time.

The review recommended that practices across the UK should be aligned and brought up to date with the most recent scientific research in order to prevent negative welfare to lambs. In addition, the review concluded that the codes of practices for the welfare of sheep should be updated to reflect the recommendations made in the review.

Find out more about the AWC's recommendations [here](#).

Other news from the industry

General

[New farm health management award opens for entries](#)

[Online health and welfare training for farmers launched by vets](#)

[Farmers calling for support to protect livestock from growing sea eagle issues](#)

[Industry wide antibiotic amnesty running throughout November](#)

Sheep

England's sheep flock has reached its lowest numbers in over 10 years

Much needed increase in sheep vaccine availability confirmed

Cattle

AHDB appoints three new strategic dairy farms

Upcoming events

**25 October – NSA Sheep Farmers Conference, The National Conference Centre,
Coventry Road, Solihull**

**9 November - HCC Annual Conference, Members' Centre, Royal Welsh Showground,
Builth Wells**

11 November – UK Sheep Welfare Strategy launch

We are an independent, industry-based body tasked with helping farmers and stock managers tackle sheep and cattle disease, and build the health and welfare status, resilience and production efficiency of our national flock and herd. See more about our aims [here](#).

