

Welcome to Ruminant Health & Welfare

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

It's certainly been a busy, and at times challenging, month for the agricultural sector and RH&W. The spread of the latest strain of the bluetongue virus (BTV-3) from Europe to the UK with five cases now confirmed has required increased surveillance, with all ruminant farmers across the four nations asked to remain vigilant for the disease, but especially those in the temporary control zone around the initial case.

It has however been gratifying to see the industry unite and take rapid and effective action to prevent the spread of BTV-3 wherever possible. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have been involved in the working group and all industry professions who have provided expertise and knowledge so far.

On a different note, this month has seen the exciting and positive launch of the first five-year UK Sheep Welfare strategy. The industry and its stakeholders joined forces to produce this strategy, a first of its kind for the sheep sector.

The industry's shared vision and hope is for the UK sheep sector to demonstrate evidence-based progress in six key areas of sheep welfare over the next five years and beyond. We are looking for ongoing support of the strategy and if your organisation would like to get involved in the working group or support the strategy, please email RuminantHW@ahdb.org.uk.

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

With best wishes,

Gwyn Jones
Chair
RH&W

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Bluetongue latest update

Following active surveillance within the 10km [temporary control zone \(TCZ\)](#), a further four cases of bluetongue serotype 3 (BTV-3) were identified in cattle on two additional farms on 26 November.

This discovery makes it clear that the ongoing surveillance protocol is working. All of these additional confirmed cases are from cattle with no clinical signs, all of which are on farm premises within the 10km TCZ that surrounds the first case found near Canterbury, Kent on 11 November. All cases have been culled to prevent further onward transmission.

To date, there is no evidence of circulating virus in the UK midge population and with the overall temperature dropping, the risk of midge disease transmission is reducing.

The TCZ continues to remain in place with on-going surveillance on all livestock, so please ensure your animals are registered – it's never too late to register your stock officially.

Legislation remains in place around any movement of animals into and out of the control zone. View the latest licences available and how to apply on [the RH&W website](#).

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](#).



A teal-colored graphic with white text and icons. At the top right is a circular icon containing a white silhouette of a sheep. Below it, the text "Bluetongue hotline:" is written in a large, bold, white sans-serif font. Underneath that, the phone number "024 77 71 03 86" is displayed in a slightly smaller, bold, white sans-serif font. In the bottom left corner, there are white silhouettes of a cow, a sheep, and a goat. In the bottom right corner, the hashtag "#BTV3" is written in a bold, white sans-serif font.

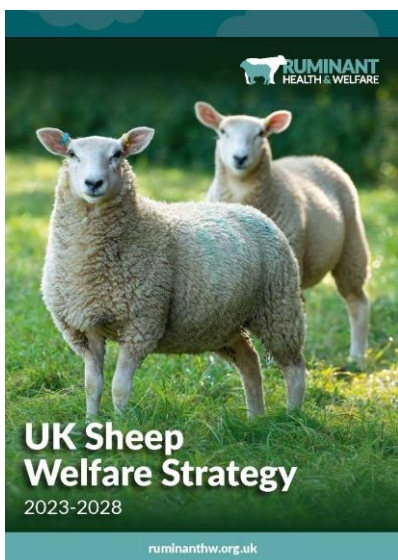
Advice for farmers

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

- **Buyer beware**, source animals from Europe responsibly and request pre-movement testing.
- **Take action**, prioritise biosecurity and report any suspicious clinical signs.
- **Vigilance** is key, monitor livestock closely.

Farmers can access and call the dedicated bluetongue hotline to get advice or ask questions linked to the current situation – call the **bluetongue hotline on 024 7771 0386**.

Sheep Welfare Strategy launched



[The UK Sheep Welfare Strategy for 2023-2028](#), a pioneering initiative in the sheep industry, was launched earlier this month. Farmers, vets, processors and industry bodies joined forces and were facilitated by Ruminant Health & Welfare (RH&W) to launch the strategy which is a first of its kind for the sector.

RH&W Chair, Gwyn Jones, chaired the launch and explained that the strategy is aimed at enhancing sheep welfare across the UK by 2028, irrespective of the farm's size, location, or production system.

The strategy focuses on demonstrating progress in six key welfare areas, aiming to improve both the health and productivity of the sector, thereby positively impacting its carbon footprint and the mental health of farmers.

The six strategic goals in the strategy are:

- **Healthy feet** – reducing lameness for all sheep to improve overall health and welfare by increasing mobility, productivity, and longevity.
- **Appropriate body condition** – ensuring optimal body condition score to improve resilience to disease and fertility, and a breeding female's ability to rear thriving lambs.
- **Thriving lambs** – ensuring lambs are born strong and thrive throughout life by providing good nutrition and protection against disease.
- **Collaborative flock** management – ensuring active collaboration between farmers, vets, and advisers to aid the development of optimal flock health and welfare plans.
- **Positive welfare** – ensuring all management decisions are made with a focus on welfare and considered through the eyes of the flock.
- **Sheep comfort** – ensuring every farm has a proactive pain management plan to optimise the comfort of sheep and aid their ability to overcome disease, illness, and/or injury.

Phil Stocker, Chief Executive of the [National Sheep Association](#) and member of the RH&W steering group, highlighted the strategy's role in advancing the sector's reputation by driving welfare improvements. The strategy includes a five-step delivery plan and a commitment for regular stakeholder meetings to ensure progress in each goal, with annual progress reports for transparency.

Dr Rebecca Mearns, advanced practitioner in sheep health and production at Biobest laboratories, presented during the live launch and shared how this strategy is a sign of industry taking responsibility and ownership and as a result putting the control firmly in the sectors hands.

Dr Mearns explained “This strategy places welfare at the centre of what we can do to continue to improve our sector. In doing this it will lead industry to improved sheep health, reduced medicine usage, improved efficiency and lower greenhouse gas emissions.”

The strategy's launch marks a collective effort in the sheep sector towards achieving these goals, with over 95 organisations and businesses endorsing it.

This initiative is part of RH&W's broader effort to develop welfare strategies for all UK ruminant sectors. The [Dairy sector strategy](#) was developed earlier this year and the Beef sector one will be launch in 2024.



Download the sheep welfare strategy now.

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](#).

Presenting on production efficiency in UK cattle

At this years [British Cattle Breeders conference](#) Tim Geraghty, Veterinary Centre Manager at Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), will be presenting a session on production efficiency in UK cattle.

Tim, who spoke at a monthly RH&W steering group meeting earlier this year, focuses on cattle health and production and has extensive clinical, research and teaching experience.

Tim will present on a technical efficiency metric for the UK cattle herd, with data from the Cattle Tracing Database for England and Scotland. These data sets cover a 6-year period of measuring production efficiency.

[Book your tickets now](#) and listen to Tim on Tuesday 23 January.



Helping hands for lambing season

The National Sheep Association (NSA) has launched its [Lambing List](#), a vital resource for UK sheep farmers during the annual lambing season.

This initiative connects farmers requiring extra labour and support with agricultural and veterinary students looking to gain field experience.

NSA has highlighted [the Lambing List's](#) role as a key resource which facilitates direct engagement between farmers and students. The streamlined application process for NSA members to advertise, ensures maximum effectiveness.



Non-member sheep farmers can access membership details on the NSA website, while students can easily find placement opportunities, categorised by region, on the [NSA Next Generation website](#).

The [NSA Next Generation](#) platform also offering extensive resources for individuals starting their career in agriculture.

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

Other news from the industry

General

[Red Tractor review](#)

[Imports of ruminants banned by the Isle of Man](#)

[Ongoing aims to reduce antibiotic usage in livestock](#)

Sheep

[Could mineral blood tests help to reduce barren rates in flocks](#)

Cattle

[Controversy over Welsh plans for TB testing](#)

[New technical guide published by The Control of Worms Sustainably \(COWS\) group to reflect changes in parasite control](#)

Upcoming events

3 to 5 Jan 2024 - [Oxford Farming Conference](#)

17 to 18 Jan 2024 – [LAMMA, NEC Birmingham](#)

22 to 24 Jan 2024 - [The 2024 British Cattle Breeding Conference, Telford, Shropshire](#)

7 Feb 2024 – [DairyTech, Stoneleigh Park, Coventry](#)

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](#).



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Our mailing address is:

Ruminant Health & Welfare
(c/o AHDB),
Middlemarch Business Park, Siskin Parkway East
Coventry, Warwickshire CV3 4PE
United Kingdom

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