

## **Welcome to Ruminant Health & Welfare**

### **Welcome to the first RH&W newsletter of 2024**

Our important work continues with our focus now on developing a beef welfare strategy with the working group as well as progressing the welfare goals identified in the [dairy and sheep strategies](#) through 2024.

As mentioned in my last newsletter, the strength of collaboration across the industry has been phenomenal and is much needed with the difficult challenge facing the ruminant sector in BTV-3, the latest strain of bluetongue.

Thank you to everyone who supported the Norfolk farmers bluetongue meeting on 15 January and has been helping to promote the [AHDB technical webinars](#) looking at BTV as well as Schmallerberg so far.

Access to sign up to the next technical bluetongue meeting, recordings from past webinars and FAQ's from all the events held so far, are all accessible on our [RH&W bluetongue hub](#).

*[Correction from Gwyn Jones – apologies for any confusion with a link previously shared, the Defra BVD scheme is not yet live]*

I visited DairyTech on the 7th of February. It was very well attended and it's an excellent event to meet many people from the dairy industry and hold a few short face to face meetings. I spoke at the 'Dairy Hub', where I outlined government plans on the Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) eradication scheme which will be launched later this year. It is three-year voluntary scheme where farmers will receive payment for blood testing and if the disease is found to be present, a PI hunt in the herd.

Farmers will be eligible for both monitoring or disease eradication, if found, for the three years and then legislation will arrive which will ensure that all farmers in England (as they do in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) will need to carry out the same without payment.

I would encourage all farmers, beef and dairy to register on the [Defra Pathway programme](#) and also then register on the BVD eradication scheme and take full advantage of the money on offer in the next three years.

As ever, if you would like to join the working group or support the strategies, or have feedback for the group, please email [RuminantHW@ahdb.org.uk](mailto:RuminantHW@ahdb.org.uk).

**Gwyn Jones**  
**Chair**  
**RH&W**

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### **Bluetongue 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**.

### **New and old ways to reduce farm emissions**

Tim Geraghty, Veterinary Centre Manager at SRUC explained at the recent BCBC how existing cattle tracing data could be used to identify 'wasted days'.

He explained that monetary values and carbon emissions could then be calculated for this waste, against an optimal model.

A pilot study of cattle movement database in England and Scotland from 2015 to 2020 revealed there were 550m 'waste days' costing £860m and producing 3.1m t/CO<sub>2</sub>.

This was largely caused by poor growth and fertility and early death. Improving these three areas would be the most cost-effective carbon reduction strategy, he added.

Read more from the conference:

[How genetics, data and technology can help reduce farm emissions \(cattlebreeders.org.uk\)](https://cattlebreeders.org.uk)

Tim originally presented his finding to the RH&W steering group which posed some very interesting discussion following the [Acting on Methane report](#) and work the group has done in this area.

### **Methane report**

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](#).

### **Importance of exploring all abortions**

As we approach spring calving, an important topic of discussion within the Ruminant Health & Welfare steering group has been investigating abortions and 'black box thinking' – creating a culture and systems where farmers and vets explore all abortions to learn from them.

Abortion investigation can help farms identify diseases or issues facing the herd, or not as a route to improve cattle health and productivity.

[The importance of investigating abortions in cattle \(agriland.ie\)](#)

Information for vets: [sub-handbook.pdf \(defra.gov.uk\)](#)

### **2024 lambing survey now live**

The latest edition of this annual survey from University of Nottingham School of Veterinary Science and Medicine is now open.

The information gained from the survey helps understand the impact of the virus and the scale of the outbreak this year of both Schmallenberg virus and BTV3 virus to add to their knowledge of the cyclical pattern of Schmallenberg virus.

Read more and take part: [2024 UK lambing survey \(office.com\)](#)

### **Update from Control Of Worms Sustainably (COWS)**

Liver fluke experts from COWS and [SCOPS](#) met recently and agreed that as had been predicted, the unusual weather patterns of 2023 have impacted the level and timing of the risk of liver fluke disease across the UK significantly.

Read more about the findings here:

[Later than normal challenge from liver fluke this January - COWS - Promoting Sustainable Control of Cattle Parasites](#)

### **Now in force – vet attestation compliance for export**

As of 13/12/2023 it's essential for farmers who are not part of an assurance scheme to obtain a signed declaration from their vet to meet export requirements.

If farmers do not possess a [VAN \(Vet Attestation Number\)](#), it is crucial to take the necessary steps to acquire one through their vet.

Read more [here](#).

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

## Other news from the industry

### **General**

- [Catastrophic Food System Disruption Farmer Survey](#) – a project funded by the British Academy, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Royal Society
- [Vets needed to shape Medicine Hub future | Vet Times](#)
- [Tips for avoiding contamination and wastage of dairy rations](#)

### **Sheep**

- [NSA urges vigilance among sheep farmers of lambing season risks](#)
- [Submit a lambing placement or view student lambing placements](#)
- [New anti-sheep worrying bill wins full government support](#)

### **Cattle**

- [GB cattle quarterly report](#)
- [Antimicrobial use across dairy farms in UK sample continues to fall](#)

## Upcoming events

27th April - [NBA Beef Expo \(nationalbeefassociation.com\)](https://nationalbeefassociation.com)

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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