FOLD NEWS April 2026

Lambing Season: A Baa-rilliant year or a bit of a bleat??

Whether your just getting started or the end is in sight it's always good to reflect on how the sheep & lambs have performed each lambing season! Some questions to pounder during those sleepless nights in the lambing shed!

Take 5 mins to reflect on the 2026 lambing season:



- What % of ewes lambing required intervention?
- What was the common reasons for further assistance required?
- What was disease incidence levels for neonatal conditions?
    - Watery mouth? Joint ill/navel ill? Entropion?
    - What factors increased/decreased cases this year?
- What was disease incidence levels for common ewe conditions?
    - Vaginal prolapses? Staggers? Hypocalcaemia? Mastitis?
    - What factors increased/decreased cases this year?
- Abortion/barren rates? It is recommended to vaccinate sheep at least 4
- weeks before insemination/mating to provide foetal protection from the first day of conception.
- How did lambing numbers compare to scan %?
- What was lamb mortality & morbidity rate?
- How did it compare to previous years? 2023? 2024? 2025?

- What factors ensured a successful lambing season?
- What changes would you make to your lambing strategy to prepare for next year's lambing?

Points for concern→ Major spikes in specific neonatal or ewe conditions, high mortality rates in lambs & sheep, unexpected lamb loss, abortion storm >2%, consistent mismatch between scan % & lambing % would be worth a conversation with a vet!

Seen an unusually high number of empty or aborted ewes this lambing season??



Consider blood sampling 6–8 of these ewes at the end of lambing to help identify any underlying issues. Keep in mind that a positive serology result does not provide a definitive diagnosis for the cause of abortion, as it may reflect historic exposure. However, it can still offer valuable insight for future flock health planning & management decisions.
Antibody levels for certain infectious causes of abortion are typically highest around 3–4 weeks post-abortion and may decline over time. For this reason, it's advisable to sample affected animals as soon as possible prior to culling.
Sampling protocols can be tailored to each farm, but commonly tested conditions include:

- Enzootic abortion of ewes (EAE)
- Toxoplasmosis
- Border disease
- Tick-borne fever

Preparing for Spring Cattle Turnout:

With straw & silage in short supply this year may see turnout for many herds to pasture sooner rather than later but are they ready?!

Bull Breeding soundness exams:

A bull's fertility can vary from year to year; a strong pregnancy rate in one season does not guarantee similar performance in the next. That's why a timely Bull Breeding Soundness Exam (BBSE) is essential before the mating season begins, ensuring everything is functioning properly.

A fully fertile bull is expected to achieve:

- Around **60% conception rate** within the first 9 weeks (to first service)
- Approximately **94% overall pregnancy rate**

In comparison, a subfertile bull may only reach:

- Around **40% conception rate to first service**
- About **75% pregnancy rate**



Subfertility can be either temporary or permanent, but in both cases, it can have significant economic consequences and create huge management challenges within the herd. Conducting a BBSE early provides valuable time to address any issues that may be identified. This is especially important because the production and maturation of sperm can take up to two months, meaning delays in diagnosis can have huge detriment impacts on prolonging the breeding season.

Are the cows ready to see the bull?



Timing is essential when it comes to your BVD Vaccine! It is recommended to vaccinate cattle at least 3 weeks before insemination/mating to provide foetal protection from the first day of conception. Always check the datasheet before administering vaccines!

BVD check test

Forgot your BVD check test this year? No problem! All we require is 5-10 eligible animals (unvaccinated homebred calves between 9-18 months) per management group. On the bloods the lab tests for BVD antibody to assess exposure to the BVD virus within the herd. A PI hunt may need to follow any positive results following a check test. Also, a reminder for any applications to the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, BVD check tests is covered by this funding!

A rise in Pneumonia cases this spring?

Consider pneumonia serology blood testing pneumonia affected calves from this calving season to identify possible offending pathogens in affected animals. Seroconversion (time to produce antibodies to the pathogen) takes around two to three weeks. Prior exposure and vaccination can lead to seroconversion. This can help to tailor housing protocols for next season & vaccine programmes can be altered accordingly.

Heifer Pelvimetry

The single major cause of dystocia (difficult calving) is the disproportion between the size of the calf and the cow's birth canal (pelvic area). Pre-breeding check for heifers will allow for more appropriate selection of replacements within your herd. Pelvic scoring involves measuring the internal pelvic width & height with a rice pelvimeter, these numbers are used to calculate the pelvic area, this number is then correlated to age, breed & weight within a standardised traffic light chart system. Call the surgery for more information on booking in your heifers for pre breeding checks!

Dates for your diary

Mastering Medicine Course Thursday 21st May 1pm to 3pm at the Surgery, £55+ vat per person

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