FOLD NEWS NOVEMBER 2026

Pneumonia

Unfortunately, we are headed into the prime time for pneumonia out on farm.

Pneumonia is inflammation to the airways, and there are several factors involved in the development of disease – bacteria and viruses, the environment and animal immune status. Physiological stress is a major factor in development of clinical disease.

Calves at housing are under immense physiological stress. The box below shows just a few of the causes of stress for calves. It is hardly a surprise that we add in a small bit of temperature fluctuation, and we see outbreaks of pneumonia.

Causes of Calf Stress

Calves are highly susceptible to sub-optimal environmental conditions.

- Dietary change at weaning and/or housing
- Poor water intake – water not clean/appetising
- Weaning from dam
- Any period of handling (clipping, dehorning)
- Movement of groups
- Mixing of groups – social and age
- Too warm, too humid, too cold, too draughty…
- Uncomfortable/unclean bedding
- Overcrowding
- Underlying infectious diseases causing physiological stress – BVD, lungworm, TE deficiencies

Pre-existing issues

Causes of pneumonia outbreaks run deep and although the initial circumstances are important, it is also pertinent to consider the overall health status of the calves. We can ask ourselves:

- ? Is there a risk of the presence of BVD on farm?
- ? Could they be suffering from concurrent diseases? Could there be a lungworm burden for calves after the grazing season? Have they been wormed?
- ? Trace element deficiencies are intrinsically linked to general health and certainly a fully functioning immune system. For example, deficiencies in selenium would certainly be a factor in poor immunity. We can ascertain TE status via bloods and supplement from there.
- ? Did the calves receive sufficient colostrum, in the right time frame, of a high enough quality?



Vaccination

There are good vaccines available for pneumonia. Several combinations are available which cover the most common causes of outbreaks. Intranasal vaccines provide cover in just days and can be used in calves from 5 days old. Financially they make complete sense – stacking the cost against just one calf loss or inevitable depressed growth rate will soon make them worth it.

Vaccination principles apply. If we vaccinate, we can lessen the amount of pneumonia seen and the intensity. It will not remove the risk entirely, but it will go some way in preventing it.

Diagnostics

A good diagnostic procedure will enable us to identify the needed vaccines and is a cost-effective way to target disease.

- 3–5 untreated calves at early stage of disease for a double swab from the backs of their nose, and a blood sample (ideally repeated after 6 weeks)
- Fresh PME of lost calves in cases of death before treatment given.

Pursuing diagnostics will help you formulate a plan for the next season and ensure your money is spent wisely on vaccinations in the future.

Is it worth it?

Yes! We mostly think about acutely sick calves receiving an expensive antibiotic injection as those that are costing us money. Unfortunately, it is likely that several other calves in the group are also suffering from subclinical disease. This means we do not see bad clinical signs, but they often do not reach their full potential growth.

Prevention

- ✓ Separating management tasks (weaning, housing, worming, clipping backs), starting early and prioritising the order of jobs.
- ✓ Clean and dry bedding, good clean water sources, and phasing in diet changes sensitive to the calves' needs.
- ✓ Lowering stress (see box above) where possible.
- ✓ Vaccination, e.g. intranasal, or a robust plan guided by diagnostics. Screening for underlying diseases.
- ✓ Bloods to check trace element levels to ensure no deficiencies.
- ✓ Consideration of lungworm risk and treatment if necessary.
- ✓ Looking at all stages of calf life, including colostrum and general health.

Bluetongue

Our area has remained clear of clinical cases of bluetongue in October despite the warmer than average daily temperatures. What we are more concerned about now is the unseen effects of the disease – damage that has been done. Generally spring calving PDs have been good to date but there are many more herds left to scan. We have failed on semen evaluation a number of tups that have moved up north from more southern areas and we suspect the infertility is blue tongue related. When a pregnant cow is infected with virus there is a risk the unborn calf can have brain deformities – this may result in an abortion, a still birth, or a dopey calf unable to stand. We have recently investigated a bovine abortion to the west of the practice area where this was the case. We may have yet to see the effects of Bluetongue in our practice area. The risk for 2026 is decreasing as temperatures fall

but we are strongly advising herds and flocks vaccinate in advance of the 2027 risk period. There is plenty of time and handling opportunities between now and the end of May to vaccinate stock. We also want to avoid huge pressures on vaccine supply so if you plan to vaccinate let us know so we can advise the pharmaceutical companies in advance to help them anticipate supply.

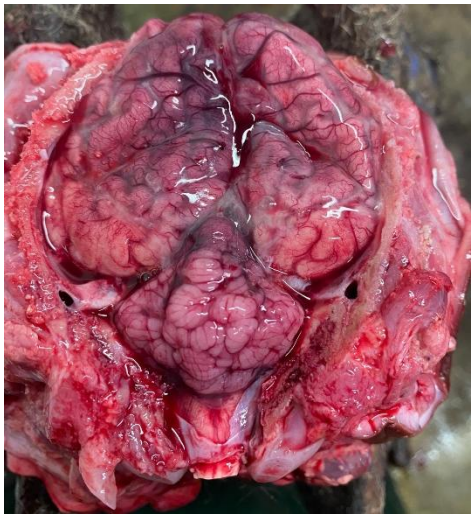


Photo of an aborted calf brain with left hand side missing.

Dates for your diary

To book on any of the events please phone the surgery 01434 239444 or email enquiries@thefoldfarmvets.co.uk

Sheep Iceberg Diseases – a focus on Johnes, MV and OPA
Wednesday 11th November. 7.15pm, Alston House Hotel, Alston. Evening Talk. Supper provided.

Tackle your suckler spring calving problems now: Feeding for success.
Wednesday 25th November 7.15pm, The Manor House Inn, Carterway Heads. Evening talk. Supper provided.