



FARM NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2024

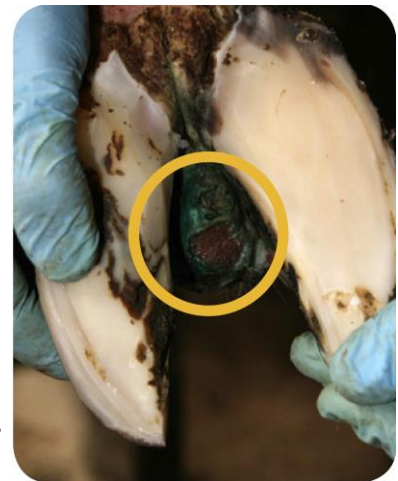
UPCOMING EVENTS

Join us for our **LAMBING COURSE** on **TUESDAY 6th February** at our North Tawton branch. We will start at 10:30 with a morning of discussion and theory before a practical session after lunch. Please call reception or book online to guarantee a place at £60 + VAT for first person, £30pp + VAT for additional attendees from same farm. There is a 50% discount for SHC members. Please bring wellies/overalls for the practical session. Please note the practical session is not appropriate for pregnant women.

HEALTHY FEET PROGRAMME

Clare is in the process of completing a **Healthy Foot Programme** in conjunction with BCVA and AHDB. This programme identifies which foot lesions are the main cause of lameness on your farm and can then help focus which areas are likely to have the largest impact on lameness reduction for your herd. Causes of lameness can be separated into;

- 1. High infection pressure** due to poor biosecurity and cleanliness of hooves/environment.
 - Wet slurry compromises the skin barrier around the coronary band, allowing bacteria to enter.
 - Digital dermatitis thrives in slurry and is easily transferred between cows in these environments.
- 2. Poor hoof quality:**
 - The quality of the hoof wall can be affected by genetics, conformation or nutrition.
 - Digital cushion thickness is linked to general body condition. Low thickness is highly correlated to an increased incidence of lameness, especially in first lactation.
- 3. Poor cow comfort:**
 - Poorly designed cubicles or over stocking leads to reduced lying times, particularly in heifers.
- 4. Poor cow flow:**
 - Badly designed cow tracks will cause injuries and bruising from stones and slipping.
 - Rough walking surfaces to and from the parlour, as well as sharp turns within the parlour, put shearing forces onto the hooves, resulting in significant damage over time.
 - Panicking and crowding of the herd can result in slipping and twisting of hooves. Amongst other things, this can result from aggressive backing gates or the use of dogs to gather cattle.



The average cost of a single case of lameness is £180, which equates to £15,000 per year for an average dairy herd. Regular and accurate mobility scoring by a **RoMS accredited scorer** is critical to allow early detection and prompt treatment of lesions, which is another cornerstone of the Healthy Feet Programme. Many milk buyers are requesting this to be performed regularly on farm as part of the milk contract. Both Clare and Harm are RoMS accredited and are available for scoring and assessment of lameness on your farm. **Please contact us for more information or to book a visit.**

SCHMALLEMBERG VIRUS

During January, there have been several cases of **Schmallenberg virus (SBV)** diagnosed at NPVG. The virus affects **sheep, cattle and goats**. SBV tends to affect **several animals at a time** as it is spread by **biting midges**.

At the time of infection, this can cause **acute disease** in cattle leading to anorexia, milk drop and fever, however this is usually very subtle and often not noticed. More obviously, the virus can cross the placenta leading to **deformities in newborns** which includes contraction and twisting of joints. The can also be born with brain and spinal problems, causing **weakness, blindness or in-coordination** and **seizures**. Commonly a shortening of the lower jaw is seen (see picture). In sheep, twins can consist of one normal and one affected lamb.



We have had reports of **lower scanning percentage** than expected and unviable lambs seen by scanners. In some flocks, these lambs were born deformed. Several flocks have now tested positive on antibody screening of barren ewes, indicating they have been exposed to SBV. This is also a reminder that an **abortion rate** of over 2-3% in a group or flock is a cause for concern and should be investigated. This could be a sign of other infectious diseases such as Enzootic Abortion or Toxoplasma. Samples from fresh aborted foetus and the placenta can be tested.

If you are concerned about your stock, please discuss with a farm vet. APHA are currently offering **subsidised testing** for SBV. This involves **post-mortem samples** taken from affected lambs.

BLUETONGUE VIRUS

Since December, several animals have been confirmed to be carrying the **Bluetongue Virus (BTV)** in the UK. **Temporary Control Zones** are currently in place in Norfolk and Kent to restrict movement of ruminants to reduce spread. Due to the current cold weather, there is **NO evidence** that the virus is replicating in midges in the UK and this is **NOT** classed as an **outbreak**. Affected individual animals are culled to prevent persistence and overwintering of the virus with an aim to delay a possible outbreak.

Up to date information can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bluetongue>

A highlight and reminder of new services that started in 2024, include;

- Our ATTs will be able to offer **knockdown disbudding** services at Herd Health Visits. The vet can sedate the calves for the ATT to complete the disbudding while the cows get scanned. Contact your vet to arrange this.
- Elske and Jonathan have completed **dynamic parlour testing** training and are able to offer the service. Please contact the practice if you are interested.



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