

April 2026

# NEWSLETTER



## Mastering Medicines Course

Claire will be running another mastering medicines course, after lambing time, date to be confirmed.

It is a Red Tractor requirement for someone on the farm to have undergone training in the handling of medicines.

The course is £40 ex.VAT per attendee.

Materials (workbook, notepad, certificate) are included.

Please contact the office or Claire directly to register your interest.

## BVD Check Test

BVD is recognised as one of the most economically important diseases of cattle; it causes immunosuppression thus increasing prevalence of other diseases, in addition to reproductive problems such as infertility, abortion and birth defects.

### **ENSURE YOUR BVD CHECK TEST IS DONE BEFORE TURNOUT!**

The BVD check test requires five animals aged 9-18 months from each management group to be blood sampled for BVD antibody.

The **Animal Health & Welfare Pathway (AHWP)** for cattle is focused on BVD control, and any keeper with 11 or more cattle is eligible to apply for the funding towards their BVD check test & BVD biosecurity review:

- **£905 for BVD -ve herds**
- **£1601 for BVD +ve herds**

This funding can be claimed for multiple herds on one farm, ie autumns and springs.

**Please speak to Emili or Claire if you need help applying for pathway funding.**

## Rearing Heifers:

### Setting Her Up for Success

It is generally recommended that heifers should reach 65% of their mature weight before bulling. The timing and way in which heifers reach their bulling weights is important.

Rearing of keeping heifers can be split into three systems:

- Early gain ie systems with high-input feeding earlier in life
- Even gain ie moderate gains throughout
- Late gain ie extensive systems with low early inputs reliant on compensatory growth

In a study conducted by the Beef Cattle Research Council, conception rates amongst heifers reared in different systems are similar, but **heifers reared in 'late gain' systems had 15% more first cycle pregnancies and stayed in the herd longer.**

Reasons for success in extensively managed heifers:

- Heifers learn grazing behaviours from their mothers
- Heifers are challenged early helping select most efficient and fertile heifers for keeping
- 'Late gain' heifer rearing systems take advantage of compensatory gain on grass
- Heifers in 'late gain' rearing systems avoid the setbacks faced by over-conditioned heifers

Perhaps, the more you treat her like a cow, the better cow she will be?

## Looking Towards Bull Testing; The Impact of Poor Bull Fertility

Poor bull fertility can have a significant impact on profitability of an enterprise. This example from the Farm Advisory Service follows three hypothetical groups of cows, with one bull put to 35 cows in each group. One bull is fertile, one subfertile and one infertile.

Bull Fertility	CR (%)	No. Cows	No. Cows Pregnant	No. Cows Barren	Average Calf Age at Weaning**	Tonnes Weaned***	Value (£) at 250p/kg
Fertile	60	35	34	1	211d	8.7	21,750
Subfertile	30	35	26	9	192d	6.16	15,400
Infertile*	0	35	31	4	190d	7.28	18,200

\*Assuming infertile bull was noticed in week 4 of bulling when all cows coming over, and was replaced by a fertile bull

\*\* Assumes weaning 250 days after calving starts

\*\*\* Assuming DLWG 1.0 kg/day, birth weight 45 kg

So what impact does a bull with poor fertility have?

- More barren cows
- Fewer calves born early in the calving period
- Calves are younger at weaning
- The combined effect of fewer, younger calves weaned results in the **infertile bull producing around 1.5 tonnes less calf weight** and the **sub fertile bull producing 2.5 tonnes less calf weight than a fertile bull**. This difference in output is for a 35 cow herd!
- Interestingly the sub fertile bull has the biggest loss, probably throughout his lifetime, as he is never identified, particularly where bulls are changed between groups during mating.

Please get in touch to get your bulls tested in ahead of bulling. Bulls should be tested 6-8 weeks before intended use to allow time to address problems or source replacements.

## Abortions in Sheep

An abortion outbreak can be devastating to a flock and can pose risk to human health. Abortion rates higher than 2%, or more than 2 within 24hrs, are suggestive of an infectious cause and should be investigated. Ideally, however, every abortion or stillbirth should be investigated as early diagnosis is vital to prevent further spread and to minimise losses in both the current and subsequent breeding seasons.

In event of a ewe aborting:

- Bring aborted lamb **AND CLEANSING** to the vets for testing; a lick bucket is ideal for this!
- Wear gloves when handling aborted materials, and wash hands thoroughly. Be aware of the potential risk of infection to humans (especially children and pregnant women)
- Isolate aborted animals
- Dispose of contaminated material/surrounding bedding

Black Sheep Farm Health, Unit 4a, Rothbury Industrial Estate, Coquet View, Rothbury, Northumberland, NE65 7RZ Phone: 01669 838 288 Email: info@bsfh.co.uk

Joe Henry 07502297044      Jenny Hull 07734432212      Jack Sheldrake 07793078949  
Kaz Strycharczyk 07557092760      Claire Neillans 07717752034      Emili Canavan-Hicks 07778456969

