



Field Report

Introducing the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway

The Animal Health & Welfare Pathway is a new system of financial support to farmers in receipt of BPS who take actions to directly improve the health and welfare of their animals. Farms are eligible to apply for funding if they have 11 or more cattle, 21 or more sheep or 51 or more pigs. Initially, farms will only be able to access pathway funding for one enterprise.

There are four steps in the pathway; the first is an **annual health and welfare review**. This is a vet-led farm visit to review animal health and welfare, biosecurity and medicine usage. This visit can also be used to test for 'priority endemic diseases' as defined by the pathway- in cattle this is BVD and in sheep this is the effectiveness of worming treatments. Farms will receive funding for this review: £522 for a beef cattle review, £372 for a dairy cow review, £436 for a sheep review and £684 for a pig review.

Later steps in the pathway that are not yet available:

- **Step 2- Animal Health & Welfare Grants-** investment for equipment, technology and infrastructure to support health and welfare.
- **Step 3- Disease eradication and control programmes** including diagnostic testing, vaccination and vet advice.
- **Step 4- Results-based financing** of improvements in health and welfare

Further information at <https://apply-for-an-annual-health-and-welfare-review.defra.gov.uk/apply/>

Measuring the Birth Weight of Calves

Recording birth weights of calves is important for accurate calculation of birthweight and calving ease EBVs. As such, it is required by many of the breed associations for calves to be weighed within 24hrs of birth.

There are a number of different methods commonly used for measuring the birth weight of calves; digital scales, hand-held spring scales, hoof circumference tapes and visual estimation.

Digital scales are the most accurate and consistent method of measuring birth weight, but it can be challenging to record data in this way as it requires moving each calf to the scales shortly after birth.

Hand-held spring scales are considered to be the next best option, and can more conveniently be used 'at cow side'.

Hoof circumference tapes, while not perfect, can provide a useful estimate for birth weights and are often used by UK breed societies to collect this data. These tapes, that are placed around the coronary band, can overestimate the weight of small calves and underestimate the weight of large calves. Despite this, the data shows that weights taken by hoof tapes correlated positively with data recorded by digital scales. Hoof circumference tapes are available to order from most breed societies.

Visual estimation of calf weight can also be used, but the accuracy of this is very dependent on the person carrying it out. As such, this is of the most use if only one person is responsible for this through a calving season.

Grazing for Growth Event: Northumberland Monitor Farm Meeting: 15th February

Utilising pastures to their full potential is becoming increasingly important to help keep input costs, particularly feed and fertiliser, low. Grass is easy to grow, but hard to manage well. This monitor farm meeting will cover the fundamentals of pasture growth and grazing management.

15th February, 10.30am—3pm. Alnwick Castle Golf Club

To register for this event:

<https://ahdb.org.uk/events/northumberland-b-l-monitor-farm-grazing-for-growth>



Metabolic Testing Pre Lambing & Calving

As springtime fast approaches, it is the perfect opportunity to check the nutritional status of your ewes and cows before lambing and calving. Metabolic testing, used alongside Body Condition Score monitoring, provides the opportunity to rectify any dietary shortfalls.

In sheep, metabolic testing can help to prevent issues like twin lamb disease, in addition to improving colostrum and milk production. Optimising colostrum is even more important with the withdrawal of spectam from the market; colostrum has a role in preventing watery mouth, joint ill and other causes of lamb losses. It is recommended to blood sample 10-20 ewes to assess the metabolic status of the flock. These ewes should be from various groups within the flock- particularly ewes and gimmers carrying twins and triplets. These samples should be taken approximately 3 weeks pre-lambing. Any earlier than 3 weeks and metabolic issues can be missed, but any later and it is too late to make feed adjustments. Sampling straight after concentrate feeding should be avoided.

In cattle, blood sampling should be carried out at least 2-3 weeks after a ration change, and ideally within a month of expected calving. In a study led by SAC, a third of cows were found to be deficient in magnesium pre-calving, which can contribute to slow calving and increase the risk of grass staggers post calving. In addition to this, the study found that over half of the cows were short in rumen-available protein in the ration, which can impact colostrum and milk quality. The study also demonstrated that energy deficiencies can occur even when ration analysis on paper looks ideal, owing to access issues, and other environmental factors such as weather.

Digital Dermatitis

Digital dermatitis is an infectious cause of lameness in cattle. It can have a major impact on cattle welfare and lead to economic losses through infertility, reduced yield and cost of treatment. Digital dermatitis is caused by Treponema species of bacteria. These bacteria most commonly cause lesions on the skin of the heel bulbs, but can also be found between the digits or around the coronary band. These lesions range from superficial round lesions, like ulcers, to large, generalised inflammatory tissue.

The bacteria associated with digital dermatitis, Treponema species, survive well in slurry and this is considered the main mechanism of spread. As such, digital dermatitis is a condition most commonly seen in housed cattle, and keeping pens clean and dry can be the most important method of control and prevention. Other important considerations to control digital dermatitis include early detection and treatment of affected cows, hygiene of cattle handling systems and sheds, and disinfection protocols such as footbathing and disinfecting foot trimming equipment.

Affected cows should be treated with metacam and a topical oxytetracycline spray. Systemic antibiotics are not usually necessary for digital dermatitis.

Vaccinating Sick Animals

Sick animals will lack the ability to respond properly to the vaccine, and so it is important to be aware that the vaccine is likely to be less effective than in a well animal. If possible, vaccines should be delayed until the animal has recovered. However, it is not always possible to delay vaccination, and a suboptimal response to a vaccine is better than not receiving the vaccine at all. Please note- this is not the case for intranasal respiratory vaccines as these can be used in the face of an outbreak.

Similarly to sick animals, administration of oxytetracycline (ie Alamycin) alongside a vaccine is also not recommended due to the possible immunosuppressive activity of tetracyclines.