

# JANUARY 2024

# NEWSLETTER



**Black Sheep Farm Health**  
Dedicated farm vets

## Happy New Year

With the turn of the new year, Black Sheep Farm Health turns SIX!

Thank you for your continued support, and we wish you all the best for what lays ahead in 2024.

## Smallholder Meeting: Pigs & Poultry

Longframlington Memorial Hall

Thursday 18th January

Refreshment from 7pm for a 7:30pm start

All welcome.

As always, coffee and cake provided.

For catering purposes, please RSVP to [emili.ch@bsfh.co.uk](mailto:emili.ch@bsfh.co.uk)

## BVD Check Test

As spring born calves approach nine months of age, this is the perfect opportunity for BVD surveillance.

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.

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 check test and health planning.

## Quarterly Drug Deliveries

We will be beginning to do drug deliveries four times a year. A suggested order list will be sent out with the newsletter the month before the scheduled delivery.

We aim to have the following deliveries: 'scanning time', 'prelambing/calving', 'summer time', and 'housing'.

Please find attached the 'scanning time' order form – please return before the end of January so that these orders can be delivered on farm during the first week of February.

## Bird Flu at Wooler

Avian influenza H5N1 was found at a premise near Wooler last month. Surveillance of birds within 10km of the outbreak has taken place, and no further cases have yet been found.

Please be vigilant and monitor your birds for signs of flu:

- **Sudden death**
- Swollen head
- Blue discolouration of comb and wattles
- Closed and runny eyes
- Lethargy and depression
- Reduced feed intake
- Altered water intake
- Significant drop in egg production
- Head and body shaking
- Discoloured or loose watery droppings

Some species such as ducks, geese and swans can carry the avian influenza virus and spread it without showing any signs of illness.

**If you suspect bird flu in poultry or other captive birds, please report it immediately to APHA by calling 03000 200 301.**

## Red Clover & Sheep Fertility Update: Devil in the detail

Although red clover can be a highly nutritious forage, the accepted wisdom for shepherds and vets has been to avoid grazing red clover for six weeks before and after tupping. This is because red clover contains high levels of 'phyto-oestrogens' which have the potential to interfere with both ewe and tup fertility. This theory was backed up by extensive research from the Southern Hemisphere – indicating significantly increased barren %, increased return to service and fewer lambs per ewe mated.

However, with a red clover renaissance in the UK, there has been more interest in mating ewes on the forage. Anecdotal evidence suggested that sheep could be mated safely, and an Innovative Farmers field lab trial found that ewes grazing red clover during the risk period were more fertile, not less.

So, was the original research completely wrong, and red clover safe to feed during mating? Not exactly. The apparent contradiction is likely due some differences in the experimental conditions:

- **Percentage of the sward:** The Southern Hemisphere work demonstrated negative effects in swards that were ~60-100% red clover. In contrast, the Innovative Farmers trial swards had an average of 17.6% red clover by fresh weight (the highest being 36.9%).
- **Phyto-oestrogen content:** Following the original research, clover breeders have been selecting cultivars for lower phyto-oestrogen content. The 'Pawera' cultivar used in much of the original research was popular because of its persistency, productivity, and strong summer growth.

So, we're comparing apples with oranges: the older studies involved more red clover, with a higher phyto-oestrogen content. When decision-making on your farm, we therefore ought to consider the percentage of the sward that is red clover, and the clover cultivar.

The Innovative Farmers field lab was reassuring for swards with a minority red clover content, but for red clover-dominant swards the message is very much still 'handle with care'.



## Is your farm dog protected against leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis, often referred to as leptospirosis, is a serious and potentially fatal disease in dogs. Like other farm animals, dogs are infected by contact with infected animal urine. Working dogs have contact with livestock, waterways and rodents, and so are at higher risk of leptospirosis than most pet dogs.

Vaccination provides protection against leptospirosis. It is important that after an initial vaccine course of two doses 4 weeks apart, that dogs receive annual vaccinations to booster their immunity against leptospirosis.

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