

Red Tractor - the latest updates



Red Tractor have updated some parts of their standards, effective 1st February 2025. In this article we will detail some of the changes that might impact decisions you make around medicine usage and other aspects.

The Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013 (VMRs) is a piece of legislation (law) that sets out controls on the manufacturing, distribution, and use of veterinary medicines and medicated feeds. All vets must follow this legislation when buying, selling and advising on drug usage and it has recently been updated (2024). Red Tractor have subsequently updated their standards to incorporate some of the changes made to the VMR.

The main changes to note are detailed below:

- **Prophylactic Antibiotic Use is prohibited except in exceptional circumstances** - *(e.g. treating every animal with antibiotics preventatively, before it is sick, such as using Parofofor (antibiotics) for a group of calves before they have crypto, or using dry cow tubes in every cow on the farm regardless of if they have had a mastitis case).*

If there is an issue on your farm that means antibiotics need to be used prophylactically, we must document the reason and provide evidence for why it is required every single time we dispense the antibiotics. In addition, we must undertake a management review on the farm to see how we can prevent the need for prophylactic use in the future. Reviews must be done as close to the time of prescription as possible. *(For example, if you are using Halocur or Parofofor for crypto in calves routinely, we must prove via scour samples there is crypto on the farm, come out and review the risks on the farm, and discuss how we can try to lower these risks in the future. Or, if you are using dry cow tubes for*

- *every cow in the herd, we must review the need for this, look at data to find ways to reduce the need, and set out management improvements to reduce the use of this medication).*
- **Medicated feed prescriptions** - Some of our clients will be using medicated feed, such as for coccidiosis in calves or lambs, or various medications in gamebird feed. Red Tractor stipulate that the species of animal, number of animals, **and their ID** must be recorded, and Red Tractor inspectors will look to see that you are using the medicated feed as directed.
- **Dry Cow Therapy** - in addition to the examples above, there will be more detailed sections about dry cow therapy in your health plan and vet health and performance review that we go through at your health plan visit.
- **Antibiotic Stewardship and Training** - At least one person on the farm will need to have undergone a medicine training course within the last 5 years (please call the office to book in on our next one if yours has lapsed). And if a dairy farm has had two antibiotic failures in the last 12 months, they will need to complete an investigation form.

The above updates are all linked to veterinary medicine so please consult the Red Tractor website for further updates as the list above is not exhaustive.

As always, we are here to work with our farmers and all our vets are happy to discuss the changes and any other questions you may have.



Free TB advice

At Glenthorne Vets we have had great success in carrying out TB Advisory Visits. Our vets have been out on farm documenting risks each individual farm has that makes them more susceptible to TB. The visit is **completely free** to farmers and helps to make sure that we have fully understood the nature of a TB breakdown on the farm, as well as providing lots of insight into what changes you can make to reduce the risk to the cows. A normal TBAS visit takes around two hours and consists of a questionnaire that our vets discuss with you. The questionnaire goes through the farm TB history, local TB history, incoming stock risks, pasture risks, farmyard risks and business resilience. As we go through the questions, we also walk around the farm, the pastures and the yards, to identify risks such as risk from wildlife. The vet then makes recommendations on the areas of risk and works with the farm to come up with practical solutions that are likely to be achievable. Follow up visits are scheduled for 6 months time to see how progress is being made. Please call the office to book in your TBAS visit.



What is TBAS?

The TB Advisory Service is a DEFRA funded project that offers **FREE, bespoke, practical and cost-effective** advice to all eligible farmers in England to help reduce the risks associated with bTB.

- ✓ A pair of FREE on farm visits (Initial and follow up)
- ✓ FREE telephone advice line
- ✓ Badger Sett Surveys
- ✓ Personalised Recommendations

BORDER DISEASE IN SHEEP

Border disease, also known as “hairy shaker disease” because of the effect it has on lambs, is a virus affecting sheep fertility. The disease is spread by nose-to-nose contact with infected animals. If pregnant ewes contract the virus they may reabsorb, abort or produce small lambs with poor viability, abnormal conformation, tremors, and/or an excessively hairy or pigmented coat. Some of these lambs survive and grow normally but will shed Border Disease Virus (BDV) for life – like a Persistently Infected (PI) calf will shed Bovine Viral Diarrhoea. No treatment exists for PI animals with either condition.

Adult animals that become infected mostly show no signs, although some have a short illness. This will pass and these sheep will become immune to the strain of BDV and stop shedding virus.

Key risks are buying in a PI animal or a ewe carrying a future PI, exposing your pregnant ewes to infection. In a naive flock this can have disastrous effects on fertility. In that year up to 50% of offspring from these ewes may be lost or show signs of disease. Then, as PI animals infect ewe lambs each year, barren ewes can increase by up to 8% and average growth rates in lambs are dragged down.

Is BDV circulating in your flock already?

- Although “hairy shaker” lambs are described, BDV may circulate for years before one is actually born, so BDV should be investigated in any flock with high levels of unexplained abortion, barren ewes or lambs with mild neurological symptoms.
- Post-mortem samples from aborted or abnormal lambs can be submitted.
- Blood samples from ewes can be useful in determining exposure. If ewes have been exposed, it may be worth hunting for a Persistently Infected individual on farm.

Could BDV enter your flock?

- Ensure boundaries with other farmer’s livestock are double fenced, to prevent nose to nose contact.
- Quarantine bought-in animals in case they are transiently infected.
- Buy in from known sources or disease-free flocks.
- You may want to screen bought-in animals for PIs, which should be culled immediately unless desired as part of a “vaccination” programme (see below).
- Although primarily a disease of sheep, cattle, goat and pigs can also be affected, so consider the risk from all of these species and avoid grazing ewes in early pregnancy alongside cattle.

How can ewes be protected?

- There is currently no vaccine available in the UK for BDV.
- Some sources report using cattle BVD vaccines, but this is not thought to be effective enough to recommend.
- Some farmers choose to retain a PI individual and expose their ewe lambs to it well before tupping. Transient infection early in life will “vaccinate” those ewes, giving protection against that strain of BDV later in life, preventing their future pregnancies being affected. However this animal needs to be kept well away from healthy stock from before tupping until after lambing, and keeping it on farm will present a risk.

