

Farm news

December 2021



Pablo Sancho Ros
Farm Vet

Safety on the Farm

A quarter of British farm accidents, and one-fifth of farm deaths in older farmers, are livestock-related. Many of us, unfortunately, know of someone who has suffered an accident at work, whether it is one of our farming friends, workers or a vet working on a farm.

In fact, if you work in the agricultural profession, you will have probably suffered from a kick, bite or been crushed by an animal you've tried to help. And that is not uncommon because the farming/agriculture industry has the worst rate of fatal injuries among its employees of all the major industry sectors - 18 times higher than the overall average. Approximately 360,000 people work in agriculture. That is just 1% of the population. However, the industry is responsible for 20% of all fatal accident deaths in the workplace.

We found that almost 20% of production animal workers that had had accidents rated the injuries as very or quite severe. After accidents with machinery, the most common one was being kicked in the head while castrating a calf, followed by being squashed in the crush with an animal and being attacked by a bull that they were trying to work with, and studies say that on average at least one farmer is killed each year by a cow trying to calve it.

Just to remind you, sometimes, after years of working with animals, we forget that accidents can happen. Recently, after doing hundreds of calvings, I went to another easy one. We didn't have a jack available and while we were waiting for another farmer to bring us one, I tried to calve the cow by putting ropes round my arms to pull harder. Now, after 2 nerves damaged and a doctor saying that I will recover in 6 months, my advice is think twice before doing something stupid.

There is an organisation focused on farm safety and farmers' mental health called Yellow Wellies - have a look on their website for more info (yellowwellies.org).

In summary, despite working in one of the most dangerous work environments, and knowing that sooner or later accidents will come, we want you to stay as safe as possible, because people are the most important part in the farm business. So invest in equipment, try not to work alone and, as always, if you have any questions or need advice about safety at work give us a call.

Some useful tips to make your work environment safer

Try not to do a difficult calving alone and without a calving jack - even if you have a small farm, you can find a good jack for about £300 which can greatly improve your working environment*. Also, during calvings, never ever put ropes around any part of your body - it could result in you trapping your nerves or breaking your bones.

Try to keep cattle calm and watch for warning signs of animal aggression, especially in cows and heifers around calving time, fresh calved animals and cows that are on heat.

Work with a crush if at all possible. If you can't, and you need to work inside the pen with the animal, work out an escape route or refuge in advance of handling cattle.

Where possible use a head gate to restrain a calving cow or heifer when checking the calf. Again, for about £300 we can provide a very useful piece of equipment for your farm that can make life easier and avoid some accidents.

Aggressive and difficult cattle should be culled as soon as possible.



*We'd recommend the Vink Calving Aid (pictured), as it holds the back of the cow so well and gives far less slippage than the T-bar models.

For more information call our practice on **01332 294929**
or email farmandequine@scarsdalevets.com

A seasonal reflection: Immaculate conception?

Each year we see numerous 'virgin' births in cattle, and the last twelve months has been no different. Rather than divine intervention, though, I usually suspect surreptitious visits from the bull next door, lost AI records or untoward activity amongst that mixed group of 'calves' to be more likely.

It's easy to get caught out by heifer and bull calves together in a group reaching puberty earlier than expected. Some reach puberty and become fertile as early as five months, although the norm is usually ten or so.

Be vigilant - unlike Mary, those heifers of yours may not be as young or as virgin as you'd like to think. If you do suspect they may be in-calf, ask your vet for advice ASAP. Mis-mating injections are available, and early inductions or even planned elective caesareans at term are far preferable to bad calvings in small heifers.

Carolyn Baguley Farm Clinical Director

Pneumonia

Last January we saw a big increase in cases of calf pneumonia, and this was reflected across the country. It's always tempting to blame the weather, but while we certainly can't control the weather, we can make sure that we've done all we can to mitigate it and protect those calves.

At some point this month, take some time out to spend a few moments sitting down in your calf sheds and consider whether there's anything else you can do to prevent pneumonia.

Does the air feel stale? Or can you feel a draught? When the weather gets cold and wet it's tempting to shut all the doors and block all the gaps, but this isn't what calves need. They need fresh air and ventilation, or they will not thrive, but they need it in a way that doesn't directly expose them to draughts.

Is the bedding damp or squelchy? Good drainage and a dry bed are also vital factors in pneumonia prevention. How often is new bedding applied? How about cleaning out?

The lower critical temperature for calves up to 3 weeks is 10-15°C, depending on air speed – below this, they will use up valuable energy to keep warm, rather than for growth or fighting pneumonia bugs.

Do you measure shed temperatures at calf height? Will you increase their milk allowance when the temperature drops? Is the straw bedding deep enough for calves to nest so that their legs are hidden? Are they wearing calf jackets? Are the jackets clean, dry and washed at 60°C between each calf, or are they a risk for transferring cryptosporidium between calves? Is the fabric breathable and water-resistant?

Have they got enough space, or are they overstocked? Are they vaccinated? If you buy in calves, what's your isolation policy that will stop batches of calves infecting each other?

There are a whole host of factors that can increase calves' susceptibility to pneumonia, and the more we can get right, the better off our calves will be and the less chance they will have of succumbing to disease. If we know the weather's going to be bad, let's make sure that we get everything else right!



'Now bring us some figgy pudding; now bring us some figgy pudding...'

...but please don't feed it to the dog. We hope your livestock allow you time to enjoy some festive meals this Christmas, but do be careful with your leftovers – much of our treasured seasonal fayre is toxic to dogs, including Christmas pudding and mince pies (because of the raisins), grapes, chocolate (the higher the cocoa content, the worse it gets), onions (think stuffing or gravy) and macadamia nuts. Alcohol and blue cheese aren't ideal either, and festive plants such as holly, mistletoe and poinsettia should be kept out of dog-nibbling reach.

And don't forget that if you or your animals eat any Christmas decorations, you may be at risk of catching tinsel-ititis*.

On the subject of Christmas dinners, we know that many of you are raising turkeys to sell. Well done for helping to feed the population, especially given all the talk over the last few months about turkey shortages. Hopefully you'll be getting a good price, rather than selling them for a poultry amount*.

*Apologies – Ed.

Christmas opening times

Open as usual up to Thursday 23rd December

Christmas Eve	8.30am – 1.00pm
Christmas Day & Boxing Day	Closed
Monday 27th December	Closed (bank holiday)
Tuesday 28th December	Closed (bank holiday)
Wednesday 29th – 31st December	Open as usual
New Years Day	Closed
Sunday 2nd January	Closed
Monday 3rd January	Closed

Open as usual from Tuesday 4th January

Don't forget we offer 24-hour emergency care with two dedicated farm vets on call at all times!

Farm and Equine Centre

Markeaton Lane, Markeaton, Derby DE22 4NH
01332 294929

Alfreton
01773 304900

Pride Veterinary Centre
01332 678333

Allestree
01332 554422

Shelton Lock
01332 700321

Hilton
01283 732999

Stapenhill
01283 568162

Langley Mill
01773 304914

Stretton
01283 565333

Mickleover
01332 518585

Wollaton
01159 676586

Oakwood
01332 666500