

# Farm news

January 2026

## FlockCheck 2026

MSD Animal Health, the makers of Toxovax and Enzovax, are running their FlockCheck scheme again this year, which will run from now until June. It is designed for flocks with 100 or more breeding ewes, but if you're interested in accessing the funding and your flock is smaller than that, please speak to us.

Blood samples are taken from 6-8 barren or aborted ewes and tested for antibodies against Chlamydia abortus (EAE) and Toxoplasma gondii, two of the most common causes of abortion in ewes. MSD will pay the lab fees for these samples.

The testing is designed for ewes that were scanned in lamb and then never lambed, or ones that were known to abort (the antibodies start to wane after 3 months and so there's a risk of false negatives if ewes that never got in lamb are tested). It's not suitable for ewes that have been vaccinated against these two diseases.

If you've had early/mid pregnancy losses or later abortions in your flock and would like to access the funding, please speak to one of our vets.



## Medicine Matters: Milk Fever and Withhold Periods

Carolyn Baguley



Dairy farmers: You may be aware of this already, but just a reminder that milk fever, or hypocalcaemia, in milking cows can delay the excretion of certain medicines from the body and prolong the length of time for which those medicines can be detected in the milk. This may make a milk antibiotic failure more likely.

There are a number of reasons for this potential extended presence of medicine residues in milk. Hypocalcaemia has complex effects on metabolism, hormone levels and blood

protein levels, and it can also affect kidney function and the way the kidneys excrete medicines. All this can affect medicine residue levels in blood, tissues and milk.

The datasheets for some dry cow intramammary antibiotics mention that 'in cows suffering from hypocalcaemia it may be necessary to withhold milk for a longer period than that stated'.

So, if you have a cow under a medicine withhold that has had milk fever, consider a) extending the withdrawal period and b) antibiotic testing her milk before it goes back into the tank.

A high incidence of milk fever (including subclinical cases) increases the likelihood of an inhibitory substance failure at a bulk tank level. If you have a lot of milk fever, talk to us about how you can prevent it. And remember that it may not always present as typical 'downer cows' – sometimes a high LDA incidence can be due to subclinical calcium deficiency.



## PRACTICAL LAMBING COURSES



JOIN US FOR SOME HANDS ON PRACTICAL LAMBING COURSES AT OUR MARKEATON PRACTICE.

27<sup>TH</sup> JAN AND 5<sup>TH</sup> FEB 2026

£78.80 + VAT

10AM-2PM

PLEASE CALL THE PRACTICE TO SECURE YOUR PLACE

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# Managing calves through the cold weather

Gualter Graca



Good drainage on the shed is important as this will help keep beds dry and reduce the usage of straw.

## Feeding

Do you know you can manage cold weather just by managing calf feeding?

As rule of thumb, you should feed an extra 50g/day of milk replacer or 0.33liters/day of whole milk for each 5°C drop below the LCT of the calf group, you can also use a milk replacer with at least 18% fat, and/or add an extra feed during the day.

AHDB has a super useful tool to support farmers with feeding amounts for calves over the winter, this can be found at: <https://ahdb.org.uk/calf-milk-replacer-energy-calculator>. Follow the link and have a go with the tool – you can see how feed requirements change with the outside temperature level.

## Calf Jackets

Calf jackets, coats or blankets are a great tool to keep calves warm, dry and healthy when temperatures fall below 15°C. Saying this, before investing in these, make sure your calves are receiving the correct amount of energy and resting in a nice warm and dry bedding.

Could you be getting more from your calf rearing? Do you do any growth monitoring? If not, or if you like support on getting more from your calf rearing, do get in contact - we would love to help.



Raising calves can be a costly side of any farm business but can also be one of the most rewarding investments a farm can make. For some, the calves are the future of the herd, and for others calf crop is the main objective, yet for both it is imperative to keep animals disease-free to allow the best outcome.

As we come into the winter one thing farmers will worry is about the drop in temperature - is the cold an issue? How can we tackle it?

In cold weather, calves require more energy to keep warm. If their management doesn't change, they will use energy to keep warm leaving less energy to use on growth and the immune system. The consequences of this will be poorer growths, higher levels of disease and increased deaths on farm.

The temperature the calf feels is a combination of temperature, airspeed and humidity. Depending on their age, calves have thermal comfort zones - this is the temperature range where calf growth is the best without any extra external support. In cold weather we pay attention to the lower critical temperature (LCT); below this temperature the calves need more energy to keep warm.



What tools do we have to fight the cold weather in calves?

- Housing
- Bedding tips
- Feeding
- Calf Jackets

## Housing

Monitoring the temperature of the shed (at calf height) is a great place to start assessing when we need to intervene. Installing thermometers on the shed could be a great tool.

It might feel like the right thing to do to cover the sides of the shed to stop cold weather coming in, but calves also need fresh air, and a lot of it, so covering the sides needs to be made with care. So, a presence of fresh air flow through the shed should be guaranteed, draughts at calf level should be avoided and the recycling of the fresh air should be done above calf level. A roof overhang is important to control the rain inlet and keep the shed dry.

## Bedding tips

Have you ever herd of nesting score? Do you measure this on your farm?

Rule of thumb is calf's back legs should not be visible to achieve a good score. Straw is the best type of bedding for winter months as this provides the best warmth.



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Hilton  
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