



Farm news

July 2026

In a Muddle with Medicines (Carolyn Baguley)

Can we have a chat about ordering medicines over the phone?

Modern veterinary medicine is many wonderful things - advanced, efficient and life-saving. Unfortunately, it's also a minefield of a bewildering array of medicines with almost identical names, designed (apparently) to test us.

Add in a slightly dodgy phone signal, livestock shouting in the background, and a vague memory of "it definitely had an M in it" ... and suddenly we're less in the realm of clinical precision and more in 'educated guesswork'.

We genuinely do our best to get everything right. But with so many look-alike, sound-alike products, even the best humans can end up in a muddle.

I'd like to list the worst-offending products, but I'm not allowed to name certain prescription-only medicines in the newsletter because that could be classed as advertising or promoting one brand over another.

So instead, in the interests of education and mild entertainment, here's a completely fictional story, with completely fictional products and people, which – purely by coincidence – may feel uncomfortably familiar...

Dougal owns a 1200-cow, year-round-calving dairy farm. His herd manager, Florence, has lost her phone in the slurry pit, so she promotes Dougal to Chief Medicine Orderer and asks him to phone the clinic on a Thursday morning and order some medicines that she needs by the end of the week.

Dougal loves talking to the vets' reception team and so, confidence unwavering, he hurries off to pick up the phone and order the medicines. He is delighted to get through to his favourite client care advisor, Ermintrude.

There are three things on his list.

First up: a bottle of antibiotic to treat a few calves with a touch of pneumonia.

Dougal is pretty sure that the one Florence wants is called something like Cure-It-Mox. Easy. But what he hasn't realised is that the available options include:

- Cure-It-Mox
- Cure-It-Mox LA
- Cure-It-Mox LA 300
- Definitely-Cure-It-Mox

· And, just for fun, there's an entirely different product called Floor-It-Mox, which treats liver fluke and has nothing whatsoever to do with Cure-It-Mox.

When Ermintrude asks which one he needs, Dougal starts to panic. He knows that his vet, Fabio, went very carefully through the calf treatment protocols only last week during the Herd Health Plan session, at which Dougal was present in body but his mind was elsewhere, so he can't remember what Fabio said. Neither can he find the beautifully laminated treatment protocols that Fabio gave him.

Ermintrude gently asks him again, and he blurts out "just the normal one". She duly orders Cure-It-Mox – regrettably the wrong choice; Fabio had advised Cure-It-Mox LA 300 as it lasts longer.

Dougal hopes he's got away with it. Nope.

Next: Moo-Seal, a teat sealant.

Florence has 30 cows to dry off this weekend and so needs 120 tubes.

Unfortunately, Dougal is blissfully unaware that there is a specific terminology when it comes to teat sealant pack sizes. He asks for 'a box' because, in most areas of life, a box is a box.

In the parallel universe of teat sealants:

- A 'box' (aka 'carton') contains 24 tubes
- A 'tub' (aka 'herd pack') contains 120 tubes

Dougal has now efficiently secured enough sealant for only 6 cows, and a future argument.

Finally: this month's calf pneumonia vaccines – a regular monthly order of 100 doses of Brivalto.

Florence wants *Brivalto*. Dougal says *Brivalto*. The phone line says *Vibralto*.

Vibralto, just to keep things interesting, is not a pneumonia vaccine. It is a bluetongue vaccine.

When asked how much he needs, Dougal confidently replies:

"Oh, enough for everything that needs it this month – just check with the vet."

Confident. Decisive. A recipe for disaster.



Ermintrude reads the order back to Dougal to check it. He's got a noisy tractor in the background now, so everything sounds like a muffled whale song, but he's sure she'll have got it right.

Ermintrude would normally run the order past Fablo for him to double-check it, but he's on holiday this week, soaking up the sun somewhere hot.

She asks Carol-Anne instead, who looks at the list. She doesn't know the farm as well as Fablo, but the antibiotic seems reasonable, as does the teat sealant, and she's very impressed that Dougal has decided to vaccinate his herd for bluetongue this year. She carefully checks the number of cows and heifers on the farm using VetImpress, and orders 1600 doses.

The order duly arrives the next morning. Carol-Anne kindly offers to drop it off at the farm on her way home that evening before she clocks off for the weekend – it's not too far out of her way. But when she cheerfully unpacks the bag and the cool box at the farm, she's met with hostile glares from Florence and some choice words from Dougal.

Florence is annoyed because she'll have to treat her calves with the wrong antibiotic, she can only dry off 6 cows instead of 30, she can't vaccinate her calves so they'll all get pneumonia, and she doesn't want 1600 doses of bluetongue vaccine taking up all her fridge space.

Dougal is annoyed because he thinks he'll have to pay for 1600 doses of a vaccine he didn't want (Carol-Anne assures him he won't, but he's still cross).

Ermintrude is annoyed because she really likes Dougal and tried to do her best for him.

Fablo will be annoyed that his shiny new treatment protocols have already been undermined.

Carol-Anne is annoyed that she tried to do someone a favour and it didn't work out well. She's annoyed that she now has to deliver the bluetongue vaccine back to the practice, making sure the cold chain isn't broken, and come back with the correct vaccine next week. She's also sad because she knows how confusing all these medicine names can be, and she wishes there weren't so many similar names and that they didn't keep changing.

Morale is, broadly speaking, low.

Sadly, while the details here are fictional, the problem isn't.

Medicine mix-ups don't happen because anyone is careless – they happen because names are similar, terms are confusing, and conversations don't always happen in ideal conditions.

But the consequences are real: the wrong product, delays to treatment, wasted cost, and a lot of unnecessary frustration.

How to avoid the great medicine muddle

• Be very specific

There can be both multiple versions and multiple sizes of a product.

• **Spell it out** if needed. It might feel over the top – it isn't. Small differences in names can mean big differences in products, and it's easy to mis-hear. Please feel free to literally spell it over the phone!

• **Double-check quantities and pack sizes** 'Box' and 'tub' are not synonyms (sadly), and bottles can come in various sizes.

• **Listen carefully to the read-back.** Question it if it doesn't sound quite right. Even if you're mid-tractor manoeuvre.

• **Ask us to check** if you're not sure quite what you need, let us know and ask us to check – we're more than happy to help.

We completely understand that mistakes can happen on both sides – as you can see, it doesn't take much for things to go a bit off-track. If something does go wrong, please don't worry – we will always work with you to sort it out and make things right.

That said, we'd always much rather spend an extra few minutes checking, clarifying and getting it right than deliver a very efficient, very impressive, but completely incorrect order.

Thank you!

Has your bull been tested? Francesco Leone

This month, we would like to highlight the importance of the bull's role in herd fertility. Too often, attention is focused solely on cow fertility, while the bull's contribution is overlooked. Although very few bulls are completely sterile, studies have shown that subfertility is relatively common. Using a subfertile bull can result in significant economic losses through a prolonged calving pattern and an increased number of barren cows.

The consequences extend beyond the additional labour required for prolonged monitoring. A higher proportion of barren cows and a more spread-out calving season can substantially reduce profitability due to lower average weaning weights and less uniform groups of calves, with greater variation in age and weight.

If you haven't considered assessing your bull's fertility yet this year, please do! It is essential to ensure that bulls are capable of performing their role effectively before they start running with the cows. A pre-breeding fertility examination can identify potential issues before the breeding season begins, helping to avoid costly reproductive losses and ensuring the herd achieves its fertility targets.

Regular bull fertility assessments should therefore form an integral part of herd reproductive management and can provide a significant return on investment by reducing the risk associated with subfertile bulls.

Please ask us for more information!

