

Advice for farmers to 'ACT' on Bluetongue (BTV-3)

Farmers and the industry must remain **Aware**, apply **Caution** and use evidence-based **Tactics** to **ACT** and mitigate against the latest strain BTV-3.

1. **Awareness** of how BTV-3 is transmitted as a vector-borne disease
2. **Caution** against any misinformation, but instead view the latest facts
3. **Tactics** on-farm to help with midge control must be evidence-based

Following a technical AHDB meeting Lesley Stubbings, sheep consultant and parasite control adviser, says: "The fact is, a single bite from a single infected midge will reliably transmit BTV-3. This means that trying to control midges is futile and is not going to impact on the risk of BTV-3 transmission. It is crucial that we ACT with this knowledge in mind." Below is some more advice from the meeting:

As an emerging new strain of bluetongue, with no vaccine currently available, the industry is taking learnings from research, science and our EU counterparts, who experienced clinical cases during 2023, to provide the most up-to-date advice and guidance. There needs to be clear distinction between midge control and BTV-3 control.

There is no evidence that insecticides can prevent infection as they do not kill *Culicoides* midges (the specific type of midge that transmits bluetongue) fast enough to prevent the first bite nor do they prevent onward transmission. There is also no evidence that insect repellents (which deter insects), have any effect on the transmission of BTV-3. Currently, there are no products licensed for *Culicoides* midge 'control'. Farmers will not be able to significantly reduce the number of midges in a specific area for long enough to prevent BTV-3 transmission.



When it comes to tactics for midge control, air movement is key. It's also important to note that midges are most active during dusk and dawn. Farmers should act to maximise natural ventilation, particularly by taking advantage of hills, wind and rain. Farmers in the Netherlands favoured housing animals with powerful fans, providing air flow of more than 3m/s, for example. Unfortunately the increased ventilation will not eliminate all biting but may reduce midge biting rate. However, this small practical insight from the Netherlands feels better than doing nothing and will be a tactic farmers can act on to potentially help midge control on-farm.

In the UK, bluetongue, including BTV-3, is a notifiable disease, so anyone suspecting the disease must take action and report it to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).

The clinical signs can be confused with other diseases so a clinical exam is important to help rule it in or out. Generally signs of disease are more severe in sheep than cattle but it can also affect camelids and goats as well. Below are some key signs to look out for in your herds and flocks this summer/autumn.

Clinical Signs:

- Lethargy, reluctance to move (mostly sheep)
- Crusty erosions around the nostrils and on the muzzle
- Nasal discharge and drooling
- Swelling of the muzzle, face and above the hoof
- Redness of eyes, mouth, nose
- Reddening and erosions on the teats
- Breathing problems (mostly sheep)
- Calves born small, weak, deformed or blind
- Death of calves within a few days of birth
- Abortions



The QR code will take you to a webpage detailing further information about bluetongue or alternatively please follow this link – <https://ruminanthw.org.uk/bluetongue-virus/>



Schmallenberg in cattle

You may be aware that we have seen Schmallenberg cases particularly in our early lambing flocks this year. We did not see as many issues in later lambing flocks but have recently started seeing a slight increase in deformities of calves. Due to the differing gestation lengths it is possible we have not yet seen the worst of Schmallenberg in cattle so it is important to bear in mind if you have a difficult calving and you can't quite work out the presentation of the calf!

Test before you treat!



With lambing now coming to an end, it's time to start thinking about worm management as ewes and lambs are turned out to grass. There are several different gut worms that can affect both growing

lambs and adult sheep throughout spring and summer and into autumn. Each species of worm has unique characteristics, from when in their lifecycle they cause disease, to clinical signs they produce and the time of year they are most prevalent.

Getting your head around what worm is around when can be confusing, making treatment decisions, in terms of what product and when, difficult. We are pleased to offer our services in conjunction with the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway funding to help produce a robust parasite calendar and control plan for you to refer to. The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway provides funding for a vet visit (ideal to produce a parasite calendar and control plan, amongst other things in the sheep calendar) and also worm egg count testing to assess the efficacy of different worming products on your farm. For more information on The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway funding, please ring the office for an information pack that can either be posted or emailed out to you.

Testing for a worm burden through regular worm egg counts (which we offer in-house at Holly Tree) can not only help reduce costs of wormers when they may not be needed, but more importantly, targets selective treatments for animals that require it. These targeted-selective-treatments minimise the risk of emerging resistance by only treating animals with clinical signs if the worm egg count (+/- growth rates) indicate.

We are pleased to introduce our new worm-egg counting packages, lasting for 12 months from initial purchase.

- 5x WEC for £75 – a £10 saving!
- 10x WEC for £150 – a £20 saving!

Performing regular WEC throughout the grazing period will help build a more robust and resilient flock when it comes to worm control. In turn, this will increase the efficiency and productivity of your flock.

New rapid mastitis testing

We are very lucky to have been selected as one of 4 practices in the UK to trial a new mastitis testing machine. Using this new kit we are able to detect mastitis pathogens only **90 minutes** after receiving the samples meaning you could detect mastitis at morning milking, drop in a sample and have results well before afternoon milking. This could mean a reduction in use of antibiotics on farm as well as being able to select the best antibiotics when they are needed.

Unlike other in-house mastitis test kits we are able to offer more than just gram positive and gram negative results. The machine allows us to identify up to 5 pathogens - Staph aureus, Strep uberis, E. coli, Strep dysgalatiae and Strep agalactiae and uses PCR meaning it is even more accurate than culture. We are also able to use the kits to test previously frozen samples which could be extremely useful if you have taken a sample before starting treatment but not seeing the results you expected. We should be getting all the equipment to start testing within the next few weeks so why not start freezing samples now and then we can test them for you when we are up and running.

We will be having a farmer demonstration meeting on the 3rd July so get this date into your diaries. Further details will be provided in due course.

Dairy profits and how you can influence them

After the awful weather of this winter refining practice to ensure profits remain is more critical than ever before. Throughout this article we will explore what influences dairy profits and what targets we should be aiming for to ensure the farm is performing to its highest level. We can provide regular reviews of your farm's data to help you understand where you can tighten the screws even more.

Milk sales

The core milk price offered by contracts cannot be manipulated but where we do have the power to make a difference is ensuring there are no penalties and that you are providing the buyers with what they are wanting. Keeping a close eye on bactoscan and bulk tank somatic cell counts are both ways to minimise penalties.

Bactoscan generally should be below 30,000/mL. If you are seeing regular increases past this level it may be worth investigating. Easy places to start are looking at cleanliness and functionality of all the components of your milking parlour and bulk tank. When was your parlour last serviced? When were the liners last changed? Sometimes it is easy to think the answer is only the other week when actually it was many months before!



Bulk tank somatic cell count increases over 200,000/mL can indicate mastitis going undetected, chronically high cell count cows, stubborn mastitis cases not fully resolving or a lack of cleanliness during the milking routine.

There are positive ways to influence milk prices as well. By focusing on nutrition we can manipulate the butterfat and protein contents of milk and

finding the right buyer for the type of milk your cows naturally produce you may find you get better prices than expected. Nutrition and most crucially water intake will also greatly affect yield.

Feeding

Quantity, feeding system and quality of feed will all majorly influence growth rates in youngstock, fertility, milk and general health of your cows. The cost of feed is ever increasing so optimising your system's needs and the cost of the input will be crucial in order to maximise profits. Blood sampling cattle to identify deficiencies can help you tailor your feeding plan but it is also important not to forget how the feed gets

into the animals. Lack of feed space, bullying within groups and lack of water availability can all influence feed intake.

Forage

This year with the very wet weather we have already heard many farmers discussing their worries about their silage. Issues during the ensiling can mean silage is less palatable to the cows, the dry matter can be influenced and the nutrients and minerals can be completely different to



what you experienced in previous years. Our best advice is to regularly test silage before feeding it to your cows. Don't forget that first cut silage can be very different to 4th cut as well. By knowing exactly what your silage offers it allows you to cut down or focus your concentrate feeding to where it is most needed.

Health

Health is such a broad topic and we won't go into it all here but one of the fundamental things to remember is that the health of the dairy cow starts as soon as she is born as a heifer. Pneumonia or scours cases in young animals can have huge impacts on profitability once in the milking herd. Gut damage from diseases such as cryptosporidium can mean your heifers don't calve down as early as you would like them to as they will be less well grown and pneumonia cases as calves make the cows significantly more prone to pneumonia as well. That is if the heifer calves even make it to the milking stage.

There are many figures relating to the cost of health conditions in dairy cattle and it is surprising how much diseases can cost especially when you consider the incidence on some farms. For example mastitis is reported to cost around £244 per case and lameness around £3.30 per day – these factor in drugs to treat cases, vet time, loss of yield, fertility issues, etc. It is always an interesting exercise to work out what your incidence currently is and how much it may be currently costing you. You may find that the preventative measures required to improve the health of your cows actually are not that expensive compared with the cost of disease.

Culling

Older cows are more prone to getting issues such as chronic lameness, chronic cell count issues, milk fever and decreased fertility. Using strategic culling ensures the cows in the herd are the most profitable and avoids many costs associated with the diseases mentioned. Generally the culling rate required to have a profitable herd is around 20% although this may vary based on individual circumstances and replacement heifers coming through.

Fertility

Every day that a cow is open is reported to cost £4.50 mainly due to extra feeding and lower milk yield compared with a freshly calved cow as well as the value of the calf. Using this figure is a useful way to establish how much intervention should be used on your farm to achieve the best profits. Different options for intervention include checking fresh calved cows to see if they are clean and cycling, pregnancy diagnosing early so that next steps can be planned if the result is negative and using hormone drugs to manipulate the oestrus cycle. We can also use blood tests to check energy balance at various points throughout the production cycle to ensure fertility is as good as it can be.

As you can probably tell many of these points are interlinked so it is impossible to just focus on one section without at least considering how that may influence other areas. We are more than happy to work with you as well as involving nutritionists and milk buyers to ensure we can get your business to be as profitable as it can be.

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