



UK Dairy Day

The DHHPS will have a stand at UK Dairy Day in the “Sharing Knowledge Zone” on Wednesday 10th September in Telford, Shropshire. Please come and see us if you are around on the day.

Checklist for autumn block calving herds

With calving shortly getting underway for many autumn block calving herds, now is time to get ready to ensure it goes as smoothly as possible:

1) Check cow body condition.

Cows that are too thin (below BCS 2.5) should be dried off early to reduce their energy demands, and fed sufficient good quality forage to allow them to recover in the early stages of the dry period, and to put body condition back on. Individual thin cows should be checked for underlying disease issues such as lameness, lung disease or other conditions. Get your vet to examine them if you are not sure.

Cows that are too fat in late lactation (over BCS 3.5) should have their parlour cake allocations cut back to the bare minimum, and milked on for longer. They will however need a **minimum six week dry period** to ensure good colostrum production and yields in their subsequent lactation. Once dry, keep these cows on restricted grazing, with a bale of straw or hay to limit energy intake whilst maintaining rumen fill.

2) **Use suitable fly control products** during the dry period to reduce the risk of summer mastitis.

3) From 3 – 4 weeks precalving, put the “close up” dry cows onto a **suitable transition diet** to maintain good Dry Matter intakes, and smooth the transition onto the milking cow diet. Full housing of the transition cows for the last three weeks of pregnancy enables greater control over their diet, although cows can be kept at grass as long as the grazing is kept tight to ensure that intakes of the formulated ration are satisfactory.

4) **Prevent milk fever cases.** Not only will milk fever cases cause hassle with downer cows, but

they can result in knock-on effects such as retained cleansings and metritis. Diets based on maize silage, wholecrop and straw tend to be a lower risk for milk fever due to their lower mineral content. Feeding proprietary dry cow minerals or magnesium chloride can also help reduce the risk of milk fevers. Speak to your nutritional advisor about formulating the mineral content of the diet for milk fever control.

5) **Clean and disinfect calving areas and calf pens.** These areas will be heavily used during calving, and getting them ready will reduce the load of microbes that are responsible for mastitis and calf scour in particular. Only peroxide-based disinfectants work against cryptosporidium, and you should check with your vet what disinfectant you should be using and how often.

6) Ensure that you are **stocked up with calving supplies.** Whether it is ear tags, gloves, calving equipment, vaccinations or treatments, all are likely to be needed immediately!

7) **Check forage stocks for the coming winter.** It has not been an easy season for grass and crop growth, and forage stocks are likely to be tight on many farms – especially in southern England. If you need to buy in forage replacers such as brewer’s grains, or feed ½ kg chopped straw or hay per cow in the diet, now is the time to check on stocks, and put contingency plans in place.

8) **Blood sample your cows to check their nutritional status.** With only one opportunity to get it right in block calving systems, problems around calving can have long-term harmful effects on milk production, fertility and disease levels e.g. LDAs, milk fevers and metritis. Use DHHPS metabolic profiles to find out **what your cows think of the diet ...**

- **In the month before calving starts**, blood sample 6 “far off” dry cows a month off, and 6 “close up” dry cows within 10 days of calving.

- **Once calving starts**, blood sample 6 “close up” dry cows, and 6 fresh calvers 10-20 days calved.

- Continue blood testing during calving to identify and fix problems **before** damage occurs.



RoMS mobility scoring course

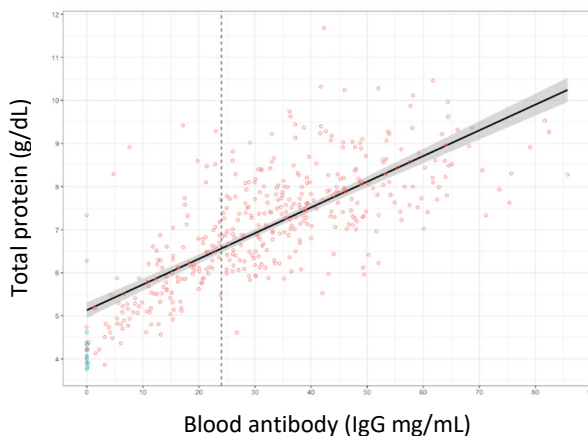
We are running a RoMS accredited dairy cow mobility scoring course on Tuesday 2nd September at Langhill Farm, Roslin, Midlothian. To register, please contact the DHHPS office.

Assessing colostrum status in lambs

Since 2023, the DHHPS has offered a radial immunodiffusion (RID) test to assess the colostrum (passive transfer) status of calves. This has long been considered the 'gold standard' test to determine how much antibody (IgG) has been absorbed from ingested colostrum.

Whilst the RID is not a cheap test at £12/sample (when testing 10 or more samples at a time), it compares favourably against the cost of losing a calf. As such, we have found regular RID testing of calves to be extremely useful in supporting dairy and beef herd managers to work with their vets to **improve calf health and reduce medicines use on their farms**.

Unfortunately, the use of RID testing to assess colostrum status in lambs remains problematic. Despite the pitfalls we have experienced when using the cheaper serum total protein (sTP) test to assess colostrum status in dairy and beef calves, we decided to use our own flock to explore whether it might be a useful test in lambs. In a short communication soon to be published in the Veterinary Record (<https://doi.org/10.1002/vetr.5435>), we show a moderate relationship between sTP and blood antibody (IgG) levels in lambs:



These results are similar to those seen in cattle and so whilst we would still advocate the use of RID testing calves, it is great news that **sheep farmers and their vets can now use sTP in lambs** as an affordable way to obtain a rough estimate of the colostrum status of their flocks.

With many flocks now drafting lambs for sale, it is worth asking how many more kilos of lamb could have been sold if colostrum status was better. We have tried looking into this in our own flock and it is a difficult question to answer. That said, we did find that **lambs with suboptimal colostrum status were nearly five times more likely to grow poorly**, which we defined as less than 260 g/day in our Cheviot x Texel lambs. In cattle, we know that calves with poor colostrum status are around twice as likely to die or require treatment.

So what can be added to the health plan now to set up flocks to target improved lamb survival and performance in 2026? With weaning rapidly approaching, ensuring that **all ewes are body condition scored** when drafting out cull ewes is a good place to start. This is particularly important this year, with so many farms struggling for grass. A DHHPS **summer pre-mating sheep test** would also be worth considering, particularly if there are concerns about micromineral status. Going forward, ensuring that ewes receive adequate winter nutrition (energy **and** protein) so that they hold body condition from tupping to lambing is also essential. This should include **undertaking forage analysis soon after harvesting** to ensure that appropriate plans are in place should forage quality be inadequate to support twin and triplet carrying ewes as they enter late pregnancy later in the winter/early spring.

Finally, a DHHPS **pre-lambing sheep test three weeks before the start of lambing** will help to determine how well the ewes are coping. Poor energy balance in ewes has long been associated with poorer lamb outcomes, whilst work in our flock has shown that **lambs born to ewes with elevated BOHBs are at increased risk of suboptimal colostrum status!**