

Newsletter

November 2025

This month Erin, our new small ruminant resident, introduces herself. Rachel discusses things to think about around housing of cattle and Tony discusses some of the issues we've been seeing in fattening lambs.

Erin Beever



Erin is originally from the US where she completed a Bachelor's of Animal Science. She graduated from the University of Glasgow in 2023 and spent two years working in farm practice in the Midlands. She started in September 2025 as a sheep resident and is particularly interested in controlling parasites in smallholder environments.

Housing considerations

As the nights draw in and the temperatures drop some of you may well be starting to house your cattle for the winter months. As ever there are some considerations to try and keep pneumonia outbreaks at bay that are worth bearing in mind around now!

- **Vaccinations:-** Spring born calves have probably seen very little of the inside of your sheds up until now. On bringing them in it is obviously a good chance for you to go through them, think about worming, weaning and getting some respiratory vaccines on board. **BUT** before you do all of this in one go – just wait... all of these things are stressful to the calf. Changing their environment, putting

them through handling systems, separating them from their mums and challenging their immune system all at the same time can lead to poorer responses to vaccine and exacerbate any shedding of bacteria and viruses that are present on farm. If at all possible (and timing of this newsletter may be too late) think about getting vaccines on board **PRIOR** to housing. If there is no choice – for instance buying in calves, then have a chat with us about which vaccines would work best – intranasal vaccines for instance give much quicker onset of immunity.

- **Ventilation:-** it seems to be all or nothing on the wind front at present. Yet cattle will need ventilation in sheds all of the time. Having a think about air circulation and sharing of air space can help decision making of where certain age groups should be housed. Ventilation options include positive pressure tube ventilation systems, fans, increasing the outflow to help draw air up and away using the stack effect. Ventilation is not the same as draughts, and to find out what's going on in your sheds the use of smoke bombs or similar can be helpful to pinpoint areas for improvement. Below is an AHDB article focused more on calf housing aspects: <https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/youngstock-housing-temperature-humidity-and-ventilation>
- **Pathogens:-** do you know what respiratory pathogens are present on your farm? If you have pneumonia cases there are options for testing at the time, or a couple of months later to determine what is present and could be causing an issue on your farm. Remember it could be different each year, especially if you're buying in animals. And as always if you do end up losing an animal then post mortems will give us even more answers as to what's going on.

Autumn Diseases in Store and Fattening Lambs

- We have had several recent outbreaks of mortality in store and fattening lambs outside on pasture. We are seeing this more commonly with the milder and wetter autumns. The two main diseases involved are Pasturellosis and Parasites. Nothing new there but always worth a review. We also have to consider BlueTongue as a differential for any high mortality.
- **Pasturellosis**
- This is a classic cause of sudden death in lambs. 2 bacteria are involved here – Mannheimia Haemolytica and Bibersteinia (formerly Pasturella) Trehalosi. These bacteria are carried in the tonsils and throats of normal lambs. Periods of stress can lead to septicaemia and death. Stress can be movement, weather, feed related, handling, lameness and worms/fluke. The disease is unpredictable – but any mortality should be investigated. We are lucky to have an excellent SRUC laboratory nearby at St Boswells that you will all know. And we are happy to do post mortems on farm. The



disease causes systemic lesions in the lungs, trachea, liver and other organs. The classic lesion is consolidated lungs. The picture

shows dark red areas of congested – infected – lung contrasted with normal pink lung.

Prevention

- Where you can - reduce stress or concurrent disease. Vaccination with the appropriate vaccine can reduce the risk – Ovipast Plus for just Pasturella, Ovivac Plus and Heptavac P for clostridial and pasturella cover. All vaccines require a 2 dose primary course. The extra P in Hept-P and Ovivac-Plus will cost you £1 extra per dose, same cost as the Ovipast Plus vaccine. How many lambs would you have to lose to have covered the cost of the additional P??
- **Parasites**
- With the milder autumns we are all seeing a prolonged risk period for worms and fluke. Regular WECs will help you monitor parasite burdens and allow you to target treatments. We have seen Nematodirus this autumn in bought in lambs going onto land that had lambs on in the Spring/Summer. This is usually a Spring-to-Spring infection – the eggs overwinter and then hatch at 10°C the following Spring to infect the next crop of lambs. With the fluctuations in temperature, we can see autumn hatching that can affect naïve lambs – like bought in store lambs. The hatched Nematodirus eggs contain an infective larva so we see disease very quickly following ingestion – before we can detect eggs in the faeces. Signs would be lambs scouring, looking empty and a group as a whole going backwards. The pic is of a very distinctive Nematodirus egg.
- **Prevention**
- Regular WECs, consider pasture contamination when planning autumn grazing, consider parasite burdens when buying in store lambs, monitor closely for early signs of disease.

