

# Newsletter

# February 2026

2026 has seen all the weather so far! Here's hoping for a better Spring! In this issue we discuss our new automated Faecal Egg Counting machine for gut worms and fluke, and we discuss the current review on lamb castration and tail docking and have a look at the implications.

## Micron Agritec MicronKit

We have recently introduced the MicronKit system to the Farm Animal Practice. This is an automated faecal worm egg count (FWEC) testing kit. This allows us to detect gut worms and fluke from faecal samples in-house with improved accuracy and a rapid turnaround.

A key benefit is the ability to track parasite trends on your farm over time. Understanding your worm burdens and seasonal patterns supports evidence-based decisions on anthelmintic use, helping you target treatments more effectively and reduce unnecessary worming.

FWEC samples in 2025 can count towards your **Preparing for Sustainable Farming** payment, with the application deadline for 2025 activity at the **end of February 2026**.

Samples can be dropped off at the farm animal practice as usual. Please collect as fresh as possible and submit as air-tight as possible.

Please note, particularly for fluke at certain times of year, it may still be more appropriate to send samples to an external laboratory.

**When submitting samples please collect in a clean airtight container – for composite samples use a teaspoon to collect an equal amount of faeces from each faecal pat – ideally 10 to 12 separate samples.**



We have had a good initial period using the machine and have been pleased with the ease of use. Autumn certainly saw a lot of worm issues in sheep – store lambs going onto dirty pasture was a regular issue.

## Pre-calving and lambing metabolic profiles

As we approach calving now is a good time to think about metabolic profiles for your cows and sheep to ensure you are getting the diet right. Ideally the group will have been on a fixed diet for at least 2 weeks prior to sampling.

Especially in suckler cows – mineral profiling is useful. Especially Magnesium at this time of year – low Magnesium levels can predispose to “slow calving syndrome” where the cows are slow to calve – can lead to increased still-births. Suckler cows on a straw and grass silage diet will need extra Magnesium supplementation through the minerals.

## Lamb castration and tail docking consultation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/lamb-welfare-proposed-changes-to-castration-and-tail-docking-methods>

There is a current consultation on lamb castration and tail docking. This runs until the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

Currently rubber rings can be used for these tasks under 7 days of age with no local anaesthetic. Beyond 7 days of age, and under 3 months of age, a local anaesthetic is required.

The Animal Welfare Council – AWC – has published several reports on this, the last was in 2022 and their concern was the acute and chronic pain caused by the use of rubber rings without local anaesthetic. They are looking to encourage reduction of castration and tail docking where possible, and they want to look at new methods that are more welfare friendly.

Several of you may well avoid castration by finishing ram lambs before they are fertile. Not possible for all systems. And reducing tail docking very much depends on your management of fly strike.

You will probably be aware of the 2 new methods available for castration/tail docking...

**Numnuts** – this is a rubber ring applicator that injects local anaesthetic as well to provide local analgesia.

<https://numnuts.co.uk>



**Clipfitter** – this is a plastic clip that is applied to the scrotum and tail – it severs the nerves and blood supply to each region, and as such it causes much less pain than the rubber ring. This is currently able to be used in lambs up to 3 months of age without local anaesthetic.

<https://clipfitter.co.uk/>



The use of analgesia to help reduce pain is also under consideration – using a medicine like Metacam at the time of the procedure to reduce pain. Currently there are no licensed analgesia products for sheep – but we can prescribe for sheep under a cascade, with an increased meat withdrawal period.

The consultation is looking to feed into the future changes in animal welfare codes, and will look to align welfare codes across the home nations.

Ultimately the changes are about improving animal welfare which is a positive move.

Please have a look at the consultation, and feed into it. We are happy to discuss.