

Photosensitivity in Cattle

Unfortunately, the sun can cause painful issues for cattle out at grazing which can result in a condition called Photosensitization where the skin becomes extremely sensitive to sunlight, leading to a painful, sunburn-like reaction. Clinical signs of photosensitivity are seen as reddening/ulceration of the muzzle, eyes and teats, jaundice, off feed, severe irritation shown by tail swishing and laying down kicking for example, swelling of eyes and face (looking like they've been stung by a bee!) and high temperature. If left to progress without intervention areas of skin necrosis (death) can occur.

There are a few types:

- Primary (due to eating plants e.g. St John's Wort which contain compounds that react with UV rays)
- Secondary (due to already present liver damage - liver fluke, abscesses, toxins etc)
- A genetic condition reported in Limousin cattle, Blonde d'Aquitane and Holsteins where they lack a specific enzyme.

There is unfortunately no specific treatment similarly to sunburn! Animals should be placed in a dark shed for at least three weeks, anti-inflammatories (steroids if empty, meloxicam/emdocam if pregnant), antibiotics if there are any secondary skin infections and there are also liver support tonics available on the market, but these are infrequently used in commercial cattle.

For the sheep farmers - we see the same condition in sheep, and it has also been linked to cobalt deficiency, seen especially around the ears!

Beef Benchmarking Farm Walk

Beef Benchmarking is back for another year which many of you will have received emails about. We have organised another farm walk to start off this year with, the details of which are below:

Date: Thursday 10th September 2026

Location: Bailey Hill Farm, Amersham Road, Chalfont St Giles, Bucks, HP8 4RT

Time: 3pm onwards

We will be having a BBQ again and will be joined by Alfonso who will be discussing Fer Appease.

We will also be sending out the Beef Benchmarking Questionnaire after the meeting too for you all to fill out again. Please contact the office or let one of the vets know if you will be able to attend.

Current Increased Risk of Urinary Stones in Castrated Wethers

With this hot weather brings a risky seasonal hazard that all owners of male castrated sheep and goat owners need to look out for - urolithiasis or urinary stones. Female goats and sheep have short, wide straight urethras that can easily flush out small stones should they build up. Intact bucks and rams have fully developed systems that can generally handle a bit of grit.

When a male animal is castrated early in life it stops the production of testosterone. Without that hormone the urethra never grows to its full diameter - leaving them with a narrow very restrictive pipeline. This combined with their normal anatomy of a S curved (sigmoid flexure) urethra even a tiny stone can get completely blocked.

With the hot weather brings dehydration and highly concentrated urine. This allows dietary minerals (like phosphorus and calcium) to stick together and quickly form solid stones. If these get blocked this quickly becomes a life-threatening veterinary emergency that can cause the bladder to rupture.

As prey animals' sheep and goats hide their pain until they simply can't anymore. Signs to look out for include:

- Straining: standing with a hunched back, lifting the tail and straining to pass urine
- Vocalising: bleating or crying out when attempting to urinate
- Dribbling: passing only tiny drops of urine or urine tinged with blood
- Belly kicking: kicking at their stomach or looking at their flanks in obvious discomfort.

Prevention is highly effective so include these tips:

- Provide plenty of fresh, cool water multiple times a day. Animals hate warm, stagnant water so keep water buckets clean and place in the shade to keep the water refreshing
- Use salt blocks to encourage thirst
- Make sure their diet is at least 90% forage based and avoid grain unless essential for extra energy in winter. Ask us about suitable grain feeds as calcium: phosphorus ratio should be at least 2:1.
- Delay future castrations until slightly older, if possible, to allow time for urethral development
- Ammonium chloride can be added to water if your boys are prone to urinary stones. Contact one of the vets if this is something you are thinking of doing as some diets may have it included.

Finally, if you suspect you may have a case **do not** force them to drink large amounts of water as this may lead to bladder rupture.

Increased risk of Haemonchus in Sheep and Lungworm in Cattle

We have had confirmed cases of both *Haemonchus contortus* in sheep and Lungworm in cattle over the past fortnight. Pasture risk is increasing and any rain (hopefully!) unfortunately will create the perfect breeding ground for larvae.

Sheep - Barber Pole Worm (*Haemonchus contortus*)

Unlike most gastrointestinal worms *Haemonchus* doesn't cause the classic dirty back ends or scouring. Instead, these parasites feed directly on blood inside the abomasum. A heavy burden can cause severe blood loss very quickly.

Look out for:

- Pale Membranes - check the conjunctiva and gums
- Bottle Jaw - soft swelling accumulating under the lower jaw
- Lethargy and lagging behind ewes or lambs lagging behind the group, looking tucked up or collapsing when moved
- Sudden deaths - when there are high burdens
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What to do:

- Use the FAMACHA eye colour scoring system
- Faecal egg count - we can speciate *Haemonchus* eggs from other strongyle type eggs at the office
- Speak to us before dosing - *Haemonchus* can be resistance to the usual wormer groups, and your flock may benefit from targeted treatment and avoid unnecessary whole flock treatment.

Cattle - Lungworm

Lungworm can move rapidly through a group of youngstock, or adult cows and permanent damage can occur before adult worms are even laying eggs.

What to look out for:

- The “husk” cough - a harsh, persistent cough especially after cattle are moved
- Altered posture - standing with their necks extended, heads down and mouths open to breathe
- Increased breathing rate - rapid, shallow breathing even at rest
- Drop in milk yield or daily live weight gain - often the first subtle sign in dairy herds or growing heifers

What to do:

- Early treatment is key - don't wait to treat if you hear coughing at grazing in a group. Treating early prevents irreversible airway damage.
- Faecal sampling - these must be sent to the lab
- Managing pasture - avoid moving vulnerable stock onto heavily grazed high-risk pasture where infected animals have recently been running
- Secondary bacterial infections may need treatment with antibiotics and anti-inflammatory - please contact one of the vets for advice

Bluetongue Cases in Devon

As you are all no doubt aware there has been a significant increase in cases of BTV3 in Devon/Cornwall primarily affecting sheep however there has been clinical cases in cattle and camelids. The numbers reported on gov.uk are reportedly 2 weeks behind cases on farms due to the laboratories being overwhelmed with testing. There is also a higher mortality rate than previously seen in the last few seasons.

Our advice is now to prioritise vaccinating sheep particularly breeding stock, including rams. There are significant delays in vaccine supply therefore orders need to be in as soon as possible. Please contact one of the vets to discuss vaccination or the office to order vaccine.

New Product - FerAppease

While Autumn may feel a long way off with the current weather we would like to remind you all of a fairly new product on the market that is gaining traction: FerAppease.

Ferappease is a synthetic analogue of mBAS (maternal Bovine Appeasing Substance), a pheromone naturally secreted on the udder skin of lactating cows. mBAS works to reduce stress in nursing calves and has been shown to have a similar effect at all ages of cattle. When applied topically it dampens the brains stress response keeping animals' calmer during high stress management events.

FerAppease is not a sedative or medicine and has zero withdrawal periods for meat or milk. It binds to sensory receptors in the nasal cavity and immediately triggers a calming effect that lasts around 14 days.

Dose: 5ml (total) per animal regardless of weight

Application: Apply 2.5ml directly onto the nuchal line (the top of the neck behind the ears) and 2.5ml directly above the muzzle (on the skin not inside the nostrils).

Timing: apply right before the stress event. It takes effect within minutes.

Uses: Whenever cattle face changes their cortisol (stress hormone) levels spike leading to suppressed immune function, reduced feed intake and weight loss. Applying FerAppease during stressful husbandry times can help alleviate this stress:

- Weaning and housing - reduces pacing and post weaning growth check in calves and reduces stress induced pneumonia outbreaks
- Turnout and group mixing - calms hierarchy battles
- Procedures such as cattle synchronization and AI, bull semen testing, vaccinations
- Transport and sales - minimises shrinkage (weight loss) and transit stress
- Calving and parlour transition - helps heifers settle into the milking herd

NorCal Vets

Follow us on Instagram @norcalvets.

Unit 2 Rycote Lane Farm, Rycote Lane
Milton Common, Thame
Oxfordshire OX9 2NZ
01844 260 616
thame@norcalvets.co.uk