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BRITISH DAIRYING

8 VET CHRIS MANGHAM TALKS HEALTH STRATEGIES

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WINTER 2025

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Reference: 1. APHA 2012-2019 Neonatal, Prewean, Postwean calf groups. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/veterinary-investigation-diagnosis-analysis-vida-report-2012

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MSD Animal Health

Strength in unity

Through teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved

Following other successful British Dairying supplements and requests for more stories showing the relationship between farm and vet team, we have produced this special supplement for our December British Dairying issue.

Inside, leading dairy vets talk about their relationship with customers and how through 'teamwork, skills management and knowledge-sharing,' UK dairy farmer businesses are developing strategies to ensure long term success.

Leading dairy farmers give insight into their team meetings and discuss their goals on achieving the highest standards of health & welfare, whilst pushing the production envelope yet further. Discussions such as - strategies for fertility, nutrition and vitality.

Articles focus on customer case studies, disease management issues & knowledge transfer.

This Winter supplement for 2025 will reach all our dairy farmer and vet readers, and important advisors and trade representative.

Tell us what you think, and I hope you enjoy the issue.

Keep warm

Caroline Calder
Editor

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www.creamawards.UK

Contacts:
Editor - Caroline Calder
E caroline@calderwood.cc
Tel: 07786 993797

Publisher
- Alan Whibley
E alan@whibleys.net
Tel: 07786 993789

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"It's been great to be involved with a new technique and redesigning calf housing to improve outcomes."

Synergy Farm Health, Neil Baker Page 12

Beyond sick cows: how strategic vet partnerships drive performance

Sarah Bolt, Technical Knowledge Exchange Manager at Kingshay provides some insight.

Modern dairy farming is a team effort. Dairying is a complex business where margins are tight and efficiency is everything. To thrive, farmers need a strong team, built on collaboration between everyone involved in the dairy herd management. Placing a forward-thinking vet at the heart of your team means that you have a trained professional when animals are sick, and a proactive consultant to prevent sick animals before they arise.

Mindset change: from firefighting to forward planning

Traditionally, many farmers have called out their vet only when an animal is sick or for calving issues. This reactive approach can be costly; whether that is actual costs of the vet's time whilst on farm, the medicines prescribed or indirect costs such as lost milk, or on-going poor fertility, not to mention the additional labour costs associated.

In recent years, scheduled fertility visits have become a standard part of a vets' role; however, today's best-performing farms take a different view: they see their vet as a trusted herd health adviser. By involving them in regular planning and decision-making, you move from firefighting to forward thinking.

Proactive consultancy means setting clear herd health goals and co-designing an action plan to achieve them with the entire farm team. Today, that team extends well beyond the farm gate, including the farm consultant, the nutritionist, foot-trimmer, and other advisers alongside the vet, all vital cogs in the 'farm wheel'. For any farming business, it is essential that every adviser is aligned with the farm strategy, so everyone is driving in the same direction.

Regular meetings with this wider team create a joined-up approach, ensuring decisions are based on accurate information and long-term objectives, not firefighting.

Vets play a crucial role in making this cohesion work.

Modern vets drive the use of data; milk records, fertility figures, mobility scores, etc., to spot trends early and act before issues escalate. Tools like Kingshay's Dairy Manager health manager services make this easier by breaking down vet and medicine costs into categories such as treatments, consultancy, and preventative care like vaccines and wormers (see chart).

DIY AI Training in small groups

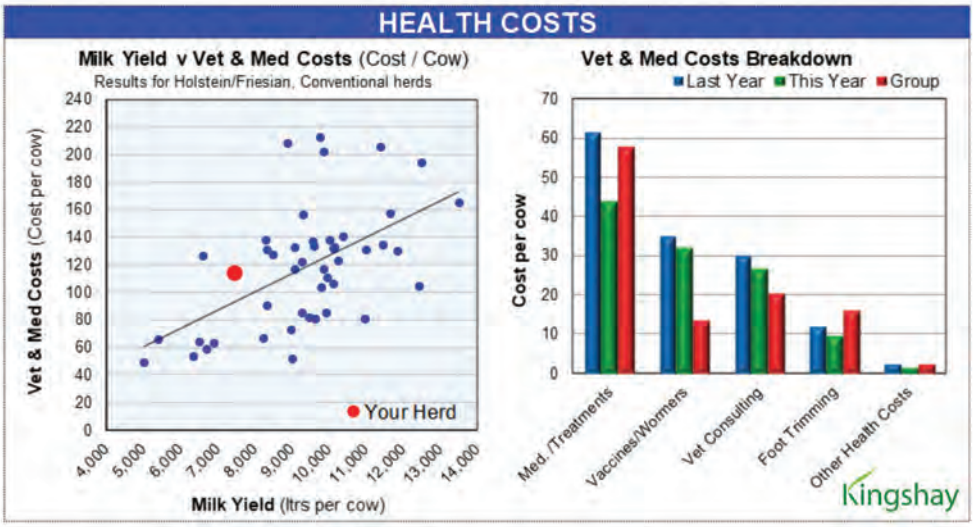
> "Traditionally, many farmers have called out their vet only when an animal is sick or for calving issues"

Kingshay's data shows that farms investing more time in vet consultancy often achieve lower overall 'vet and med' costs. Understanding where your money goes helps focus attention on prevention rather than cure. This approach doesn't just improve animal health; it boosts productivity and profitability.

Consistency counts

Even the best plan fails without consistent execution. That's where Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) come in. Clear, practical SOPs for tasks like calving, milking hygiene, and dry cow therapy ensure everyone follows the same steps every time.

Your vet, or a trained facilitator can help you and your team design these protocols based on best practice and



"Kingshay's data shows that farms investing more time in vet consultancy often achieve lower overall 'vet and med' costs"

your farm-specific needs. SOPs reduce mistakes, improves attention to detail, and makes training new staff easier.

Training: Building skills and confidence

When everyone on the farm understands not just what to do, but why it matters, they are far more likely to get it right. Training staff alongside vets builds confidence and practical skills, which in turn strengthens team morale and helps retain valuable people on the farm.

Well-trained teams work more effectively, reducing mistakes and improving consistency. Investing in training pays back through healthier cows, fewer treatments, and better overall performance, for both staff and herd.

Bringing in specialist expertise

There are times when it makes sense to bring in a specialist adviser for a specific project, whether that is building design, yard layout, or improving cow flow. These areas often require highly focused knowledge, and using the right expert for a fixed task means you can access the best advice when it matters most. This isn't about replacing your vet or suggesting they don't have the answers; it's about complementing the skills already within your team.

By working together, vets and other specialists can ensure that every decision supports herd health, efficiency, and long-term farm success.

The bottom line

Proactive planning, regular reviews of data, and clear protocols reduce disease, improve fertility, and protect margins. Treat your vet as part of your management team, and you will see the benefits in healthier cows and a more profitable business. Working with your vet as a consultant is not an extra cost, it is an investment in your farm's future.

FARMER CASE STUDY: BUILDING A TEAM FOR SUCCESS

Phil Kent, a dairy farmer near Wadebridge in Cornwall, started dairying in 2021 and runs an autumn block-calving, grass-based system.

Emergency Foot First Aid Training Course

From the outset, Phil recognised that success depended on teamwork. He worked closely with his vet, Michael Head (known to many as Spike), who acted as a herd health adviser working closely with the farm's nutritionist. Regular team meetings focused on long-term goals, from infectious disease control to maintaining milk quality, and improving diet efficiency through better nutrition and mineral balance.

Phil was passionate about bringing his staff along on the journey. "If the team understands the 'why' behind what we do, they take pride in getting it right, and that makes all the difference," he explains. Spike supported this by delivering practical training: a 3-day AI course enabled the team to carry out inseminations themselves, saving the cost of an external technician.

He also trained three key staff members in emergency first-aid hoof trimming, reducing reliance on outside help and improving response times.

Although Spike no longer provides routine veterinary services, he continues to work with Phil and other farmers in his new role as Lead Training Consultant for Kingshay, helping train the next generation of dairy professionals.

When proactive planning, regular meetings with your wider farm team, and targeted training come together, they don't just improve herd health – they transform farm efficiency and future profitability.

The Livestock Partnership: A team approach to herd fertility

How collaborative veterinary practices boost reproductive success, writes vet **Claire Walker**

Fertility is one of the most critical drivers of profitability on any dairy farm. Every open day costs money, and every missed conception delays milk production and replacement planning. However, achieving consistently high reproductive performance is not simply a matter of pregnancy diagnosis or administering synchronisation programs—it requires a coordinated, team-based approach involving farmers, veterinarians, nutritionists, and farm staff.

Veterinary practices are increasingly embracing this model of teamwork to deliver comprehensive herd fertility services that go far beyond the traditional "firefighting" role, by integrating expertise, data, and communication. Historically, veterinary input on many farms revolved around routine fertility visits—checking cows for pregnancy, diagnosing reproductive issues, and treating problem animals. While these services remain essential, fertility performance is influenced by many interconnected factors: nutrition, cow comfort, transition management, disease control, heat detection, and labour routines, among others.

A single professional, no matter how skilled, cannot effectively oversee all these areas alone. That's why progressive veterinary practices now operate within multidisciplinary teams. Vets can specialise in different areas to maximise the expertise they can bring to the herd; with a potential focus on bull fertility, artificial insemination techniques, mobility, or youngstock health. Practices will also utilise TB testers, technicians, nutritionists, and data analysts. Together, they form a cohesive support network that works alongside the farmer's own team.

Pregnancy diagnosis

This shift from individual service to collaborative partnership transforms herd fertility management from reactive troubleshooting to preventive and performance-focused planning.

Body condition scoring

> "A single professional, no matter how skilled, cannot effectively oversee all these areas alone"

The Core Team: Roles and Responsibilities

1. The Veterinarian
The veterinarian remains central to fertility management, but their role expands under a team-based model. Beyond reproductive exams, they act as coordinators and advisors, integrating information from multiple sources to create herd-level fertility plans. Their focus is on identifying systemic issues, designing reproductive protocols, monitoring results, and training farm staff in procedures like AI timing or heat detection.

2. Nutritionists
Energy balance, mineral status, and body condition all play crucial roles in reproductive success. A nutritionist's input ensures that the ration supports the fertility goals set by the team. Coordinated communication between the vet and nutritionist helps align diet formulation with reproductive and health data—especially during the transition period when cows are most vulnerable.

3. Technicians
A veterinary farm technician in the UK supports farm animal veterinarians by carrying out routine herd health tasks such as disbudding, vaccinations, sampling, and data collection. They assist with herd management programs, promote preventive health, and help implement protocols to improve productivity, welfare, and biosecurity on livestock farms.

4. Farm Staff and Management
The people who handle the cows daily are vital members of the fertility team. Milkers, breeders, and herds people observe behaviour, heat signs, and health issues before anyone else. Training and empowering these employees ensure they understand not just the "how," but the "why" behind fertility routines. Clear protocols, regular feedback, and open communication are key to maintaining motivation and accuracy.

5. Data and Decision Support
Modern herd management software, milk recording, and on-farm sensors

On farm meetings for training

produce a wealth of fertility-related data. A team approach ensures that this information is used effectively—identifying trends, benchmarking progress, and highlighting problem areas before they affect performance. Veterinary practices with trained data analysts or software support can interpret these figures and turn them into actionable insights for farmers.

Communication

Even the best technical expertise is wasted without strong communication. A team approach succeeds when information flows freely between everyone involved.

Effective communication might include:

- Regular team meetings or virtual updates to review performance indicators.
- Shared access to herd data platforms.
- Agreed-upon reporting formats and timelines.
- Constructive feedback loops between farm staff and advisors.

Transparency and mutual respect among the team foster accountability and shared ownership of results.

Data-Driven Fertility Programs

Data collection is only useful if it leads to improvement. A coordinated team can analyse key metrics such as:

- **Submission rate** (the percentage of eligible cows bred in a given period)
- **Conception rate** (the percentage of cows that become pregnant per service)
- **Pregnancy rate** (the product of submission and conception rates)
- **Days to first service and calving interval**

Tracking these KPIs helps pinpoint weaknesses. For example, low submission rates may indicate poor heat detection or inadequate staff training, while low conception rates could point to nutritional imbalances or disease issues. The team can then prioritize interventions that deliver the greatest impact.

Training and Continuous Improvement

Education is another benefit of the team approach. Many veterinary practices offer on-farm training sessions in topics such as:

- Transition cow management
- Heat detection and AI
- Lameness prevention
- Record-keeping and data interpretation
- Medicine use

When all stakeholders understand the reproductive goals and the reasoning behind protocols, compliance improves—and so do results. Regular reviews ensure the program adapts to seasonal changes, herd size growth, and evolving farm systems.

In today's dairy industry, managing herd fertility requires more than routine vet visits—it demands an integrated, data-driven partnership. When veterinarians, technicians, nutritionists, and farm staff unite around shared goals, communication strengthens, problems are caught early, and fertility results improve.

www.livestockvets.co.uk

Q Fever

Do you recognise these signs?

Weak newborns

Abortion

Infertility

Metritis

Retained placenta

Premature calving

Stillbirths

A disease that has the potential to have significant impact on livestock health and production.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Q Fever is endemic in GB dairy herds[1]
- It causes reproduction and fertility issues to cattle, sheep and goats[2]
- It is also a zoonosis, risking the health of those working with livestock
- It is caused by the bacterium *Coxiella burnetti*
- Animals shed bacteria at calving in vaginal mucous, also in milk and faeces, with infection caused through inhalation of the bacteria.
- *Coxiella b.* can be carried on the wind[3,4,5]
- *Coxiella b.* is persistent, surviving up to 5 months in soil[6]

Speak to your vet about diagnosis and vaccination if you are concerned about Q fever.

This information was provided by Ceva Animal Health Ltd, makers of Coxevac®

COXEVAC® suspension for injection for cattle, sheep and goats contains inactivated *Coxiella burnetti*, strain Nine Mile ≥72 QF Unit*/ml. *Q-fever Unit: relative potency of phase I antigen measured by ELISA in comparison with a reference item.
LEGAL CATEGORY: UK POM-V. For further information, please refer to the product SPC, data sheet or pack insert. Prescription decisions are for the person issuing the prescription alone. Use medicines responsibly (www.noah.co.uk/responsible)

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Ceva Animal Health Ltd, Explorer House, Mercury Park,
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COX30AD

Simplicity at the heart of medal-winner's approach to herd management

"Simplicity really is at the heart of everything we do, from managing cow health to what we feed them and from breeding decisions to grazing management," says **Jamie Pottow** from East Farm, Knook near Warminster.

But don't let this fool you; the 350-strong milking cow herd - Eastknook prefix - is milked three a day with an average yield of 13,000 litres/cow at 4.2% butterfat and is a top performing herd according to GTPI (Genomic Total Performance Index Holstein Association USA's classification equivalent to the UK's PLI). Jamie was also the proud recipient of the Holstein UK President's Medal Award in January 2025.

The 1,700 acre family farm is split into different enterprises with Jamie's father and two uncles taking responsibility for leading on: arable - dad Robert, the cows - uncle, Richard and all things machinery - uncle, Nick. After some time milking a 2000-cow herd in Canada, Jamie returned home in 2021 and now looks after the cows on a day-to-day basis as well as doing the 4.30am morning milking 10 days out of 14.

Edging Salisbury Plain, the free-draining farm has 600 acres of arable, while the rest of the land is down to either grass, maize or wheat for the dairy enterprise. "Like most, we try to optimise home-grown forage to control costs and we usually aim for two grass silage cuts for the clamp and up to three baled for the youngstock and dry cows. This year, despite the dry weather, we managed three cuts in the clamp and a final baled grass silage cut in mid-October; none of us can remember one that late before!"

Vet Chris Mangham

> "Traits we look for in sires include milk production, fertility, cell count, strength and legs and feet"

The milking cow ration is 40% grass silage, 60% maize, caustic wheat and ground wheat, both from the home-grown wheat, and rape as the only bought in straight. Minerals and vitamins are also added.

The herd is on an M&S Muller contract and has been for five years. Part of this means that anything 90+ days in milk (DIM)must have access to grazing for 110 days. When housed, they are in a cubicle shed bedded on sand with auto-scrapers to help ensure high standards of cleanliness.

"Traits we look for in sires include milk production, fertility, cell count, strength and legs and feet," says Jamie. "The cows are large, strong Holstein cows - not the biggest you'll see, we don't need that - with good conformation. Since M&S required the 110-day grazing period in each lactation, we do prioritise hoof traits and management, as there's obviously more walking. We carry out routine trimming at 100 DIM and 200 days pregnant by an external hoof trimming contractor, should there be any lame cows in between, we will step in and trim as necessary.

"You can have the highest yielding, best looking cow in the world, but if she can't walk to and from the parlour, or out to grass, she's no use to you," he adds. "Our cows will typically have four productive lactations in the herd, and part of the reason for this is that lameness issues are low."

Vet Chris Mangham from independent vet practice, Wyvern Farm Vets in Frome has been working with the herd for nearly 18 years, and attends regular weekly visits. "The herd is a well-organised, well-run herd which is evident by its superb performance and the lack of issues around mastitis, fertility, calf and cow health.

Jamie Pottow and uncle Richard

"Calves are relatively unbothered with the commonly-seen health issues typically affecting them - scour and pneumonia - and Emily, who looks after them, does an excellent job with great attention to detail," adds Chris.

"Mastitis levels are low with only around 15% of the cows being double-tubed at drying off and cell counts are typically 90,000 cells/ml. Fertility is equally strong with conception rates in excess of 45% and a 30% pregnancy rate. Vaccinations are also given for BVD, IBR and Leptospirosis although, what has been a challenge, has been managing the logistics of that especially for BVD," Chris explains.

Once born, the dairy replacement calves are housed in hutches until eight weeks of age when they move into larger weaning groups in pens until six months of age. They are then moved to a parcel of land a few miles away which already had a shed on-site. Beef calves are sold to Meadow Quality Calves at under 42 days of age.

"We aim to bring the replacements back to the main farm at 11 months of age when we will put heat detectors on and plan their first vaccination which will be for BVD," says Jamie. "My uncle and I do all the AI ourselves and I like to see one active heat prior to service. As a year-round calving herd and due to the fact we were bringing a few heifers back over a few days and weeks, as opposed to all at once, we struggled to manage vaccine timings, especially the second dose. If something cropped up, or we had to prioritise a different task in the moment, it was all-to-easy to get to service unsure if everything had received its full primary course and was protected."

As members of BVDFree when it was up-and-running, the herd has always been clear of BVD previously, tag testing, bulk milk sampling and blood sampling to ensure this was the case.

"As we know the herd is free of the BVD virus, this has now been pared back to tagging and testing everything and swapping to the Bovela vaccine which is easier to manage due to its one-shot primary dose and flexible booster regime plus the fact it delivers 12 months' protection," Chris adds.

"Opting to use Bovela also helps with our ethos of keeping things simple when it comes to BVD management," concludes Jamie. "Coupled with tag and testing, we are confident that we will be able to keep the herd clear of BVD ahead of the next eradication scheme which is due to come in summer 2027."

FARM FACTS

- 1,700 acres adjacent to Salisbury Plain
- 13,000 litres/cow with 3x a day milking through a 30:30 herringbone parlour
- 90,000 cells/ml SCC
- 30% pregnancy rate
- High health status herd, part of M&S's own Select Farm Assurance scheme and Red Tractor assured
- The online timing tool at www.makebvdhistory.com helps review vaccination dates with service dates to plan vaccination timing to prevent any gaps in immunity
- Swapped to Bovela vaccine for BVD for ease of management and timing

TORCH FARM VETS

Vet sense – Torch Farm Vets and You
Achieving more - together

It is not uncommon for a farm to have a group of 'trusted advisors'and one of these is usually a vet.

We find that we have many different relationships with our farms and farmers, from the fire brigade 'see you at a 3am calving' to the weekly routine and meetings with the whole farm team.

Often cost and value get confused here with some being proud that the vet is only called upon when most needed. But by far the most value for all involved are where we know and work closely with the team to allow proactive advice, ideas sharing and regular monitoring to be employed and analysed.

In this way we can prevent problems before they occur.

Risk management strategies are key - rather than being called in because we are using 'a lot of mastitis tubes,' we would prefer to have noted a slight spike or be aware that there is increased risk due to stocking challenges or seasonality and work to monitor and manage these so that those blips in disease are not seen.

Being part of the farm team with other advisors or consultants allows different viewpoints to be explored and discussed often with solutions that come from 'outside the box' but will work best for the farm.

Learning more together.

This sort of discussion potentially also allows the upskilling or identification of areas where some members may want more knowledge - which is another area that as a practice we have found rewarding to get involved.

A bespoke or more 'one-on-one' plan can be employed, or learning may be as part of a training course aimed at identifying, monitoring or managing a more specific area for the farm.

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A proudly independent farm practice, shows us how it's done

Mike Sandiford of the George Farm Vets in Malmesbury has been working with Manor Farm as their primary vet for over 20 years.

Manor Farm is a 450-cow autumn block calving herd near Pewsey in Wiltshire. They are a Holstein herd averaging 8800 litres. The farm is family owned and run by Charlie Maidment, a fifth-generation dairy farmer.

The George Farm Vets run a system whereby every dairy has a nominated first and second vet. They have also implemented lead roles allowing staff to develop in their specific areas of interest, with lead vets now being appointed in youngstock, technical training, mastitis, fertility as well as a lead vet tech. This approach ensures that all farms have a consistent point of contact but can access more specialist advice when required.

At Manor Farm, Mike has been backed up by Ellie Body as his second on the farm for the last 3 years. They encourage a team approach, involving all members of staff, consultants and paraprofessionals in optimizing performance. This collaborative approach helps to give the whole team ownership in decision making, which helps ensure that planned actions are completed.

Mike and Charlie take time to discuss nutrition and welfare.

The growing team at George farm vets, 19 farm vets, 6 vet techs, admin, dispensary and delivery drivers.

> **"The George Farm Vets run a system whereby every dairy has a nominated first and second vet"**

Historically, Mike's main involvement was during the breeding period, with weekly fertility visits, but only limited contact at other times of the year. When Charlie took on running the farm in 2021, the decision was made to broaden the scope of Mike's veterinary involvement with more regular visits throughout the year and to make more use of the specialist knowledge of the George Vets team in specific areas.

While quarterly reviews suit all year-round calving herds, in block calving herds seasonally focused meetings are more useful. At Manor Farm, these include a pre-breeding meeting to analyze fertility data from the previous year, agree future targets and actions to achieve these. There is also agreement between the breeding advisor, Mike, and the farm team on bull selection for future heifer replacements.

Ellie has taken responsibility for working with the farm on youngstock, with additional advice from Kathryn Hart, one of the George Vets youngstock consultants.

They use use health and growth rate data alongside colostrum quality and total protein results to monitor and develop protocols for vaccination, nutrition, scour/pneumonia prevention and treatment. All farm staff are present at these meetings and invited to contribute to ensure that the whole team are on board with the decisions being made and that actions are practical and achievable.

Ellie also has an interest in grazing and sustainability, particularly around parasite control. The farm has implemented a routine of monthly weighing of first season grazing heifers to assess growth rates, alongside regular worm egg counts. This has significantly reduced wormer use, from whole group

Discussing the TB plan, now in place.

routine ivermectin pour on to selective worming of only 20-60% of animals using benzimidazole or levamisole. In addition to the environmental benefits, it has allowed more proactive nutritional management of heifers to ensure they reach growth rate targets for serving.

The farm also now has a year-round monthly visit following milk recording. This meeting maintains veterinary contact with staff, allows assessment of the milk recording data to make decisions on targeted bacteriology, treatment and culling decisions. It also enables farm staff to chat through any other emerging issues with Mike and provides an opportunity for him to check any stock that may not have warranted a specific vet visit.

A Nedap collar system has also been fitted recently, and these meetings have been a useful opportunity to look at health alert data and set protocols for checking flagged cows.

Disease management

One of the main challenges encountered by Manor Farm has been endemic TB, which has led to significant losses over the last 20 years. Ben Sellick, lead vet in TB at the George Farm Vets, has worked alongside APHA, Mike and the farm team to design a bespoke TB control plan for the farm.

Ben has a breadth of experience in TB including carrying out visits for the TB Advisory Service. He sits on the NFU TB Advisory Group and Bovine TB Partnership Strategy Refresh Group which provide opportunities to help shape future national TB policy.

Initially, high risk cows were identified using bovine reaction reports generated from past skin test data. This has now been supplemented by targeted Enferplex testing, with the intention of trying to understand the disease dynamics specific to this farm. This information helped to flag up close dam to offspring disease association.

INITIAL TESTING

This initial testing has been developed into a system of 3 x yearly Enferplex testing (milk testing of cows and blood testing of all youngstock over 12 months old). The Enferplex positive cows are managed in a similar way to Johnes positive animals:

- **All positives and their offspring are marked as do not breed.**
- **High positive Enferplex cows are culled.**
- **High risk animals (Enferplex positive and Bovine Reaction positives) are managed as a separate group and milked last.**

"One of the main challenges encountered by Manor Farm has been endemic TB, which has led to significant losses over the last 20 years"

Many changes have also been made to infrastructure to help reduce disease spread, including cleaning protocols for in-parlour feed troughs and slurry management. Set surveys, CCTV and fencing of latrines are also being implemented to manage wildlife risk.

The development of this whole team approach by Charlie combining advice from a wide range of consultants and ensuring farm staff are part of the decision-making process has been instrumental in significant improvements in many aspects of herd performance and profitability.

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Team of 18 dedicated farm vets and 4 approved TB testers and veterinary technicians, provides a 24-hour service across Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Bristol, 365 days a year.

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Synergy Farm Health: Driving dairy success through teamwork and innovation

2025 Cream Awards Dairy Vet Practice of the Year winner – Synergy Farm Health. The award is sponsored by Virbac.

Dairy Vet Practice of the Year - Synergy Heath

Virbac is well known and respected for its commitment to the future of veterinary medicine, believing that this rests in innovation, dedication and genuine partnership with farmers. That is why Virbac is immensely proud to recognise practices that embody these values, through their support of the Cream Awards Dairy Vet Practice of the Year.

Against this challenging backdrop, and particularly during an era when the dairy sector faces complex and mounting pressures, from falling milk prices and disease management to the critical need for sustainability, one name consistently rises to the top: Synergy Farm Health.

Founded in 2009 by merging the farm animal divisions of two mixed practices, Synergy has established itself as a true beacon of progressive veterinary care, supporting over 250 dairy farms across the Southwest. Their success is rooted in a powerful philosophy of teamwork, continuous skills development, and collaborative knowledge sharing, principles that not only resonate with their clients but also drive tangible, positive results.

It is for this commitment to excellence that Synergy Farm Health was named Dairy Vet Practice of the Year at the 2025 Cream Awards.

A partnership model that works

At the heart of Synergy's approach is a genuine partnership between vets and farmers. Neil Baker of Leaze Farm in Somerset, a long-standing client, describes how the relationship has evolved over time: "We now have a great team of staff who work alongside the team of young vets who are really enthusiastic about the future of dairy production. They challenge us, and we challenge them - it brings new ideas and helps us evolve together."

This collaborative ethos is reflected in Synergy's buddy system, where each farm is supported by two dedicated vets. This ensures continuity, deep farm knowledge, and a joined-up approach to herd health.

> "it's been great to be involved with a new technique and redesigning calf housing to improve outcomes."

Innovation in health planning and data use

Synergy's proactive health planning goes far beyond annual paperwork. Their vets harness data from platforms like Interherd Plus, Dairy Comp, and Cow Manager, transforming raw metrics into actionable insights. Custom dashboards and KPIs help farmers monitor progress in real time, while bespoke tools developed in-house allow for rapid assessment of SCC, mastitis, fertility, and Johne's disease.

This data-driven approach has led to tangible improvements. Lung scanning of calves, for example, has revolutionised pneumonia management, significantly reducing antimicrobial use. "Disease and treatments have plummeted," says Neil Baker, "and it's been great to be involved with a new technique and redesigning calf housing to improve outcomes."

Vet Techs: Extending the reach of veterinary care

Labour shortages are a persistent challenge in agriculture, and Synergy's Vet Tech team offers a practical solution. With 15 Vet Techs and 5 Clinical Vet Techs, they provide services ranging from foot trimming and freeze branding to vaccination and AI.

Farmers like Will Frost of Childhay Farming Ltd rely on these skilled professionals to help manage large herds efficiently, which in his case is focused on dairy goat production: "They provide extra trained assistance when workloads require extra help, particularly when disbudding kids and dealing with large numbers of animals."

The Vet Techs are also integral to health planning, ensuring vaccines are administered correctly and monitoring their effectiveness. Their presence on farm allows vets to focus on strategic oversight while maintaining high standards of care.

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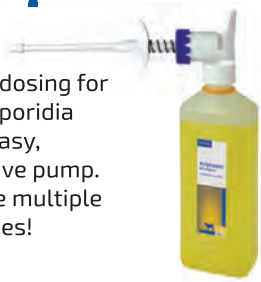

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1. Arthington J, Havenga L. Effect of injectable trace minerals on the humeral immune response to multivalent vaccine administration in beef calves. J Anim Sci. 2012;90(6):1966-71. 2. Teixeira AGV et al (2014) Effect of an injectable trace mineral supplement containing selenium, copper. zinc and manganese on immunity. health and growth of dairy calves. J. Dairy Sci. 97:4216-4226.

Kriptazen 0.5 mg/ml oral solution for calves contains halofuginone. Bovigen Scour emulsion for injection for cattle contains inactivated antigens: Bovine rotavirus strain TM-91. serotype G6Pl. Bovine coronavirus strain C-197. Escherichia coli strain EC/17 (F5 / K99 antigens). Multimin solution for injection for cattle contains. Zinc, Copper. Manganese and Selenium.
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Shaping the future of **animal health**

Virbac

Training for the future

Synergy's commitment to education is evident in their extensive training offerings. From practical calving and cattle handling to Red Tractor-accredited medicine courses, they ensure farmers and staff are equipped with the skills needed for modern dairy management. Their bespoke online training platform, available 24/7 with multilingual subtitles, has already been adopted by 150 farms, offering tailored content filmed on-site for maximum relevance.

Pete O'Malley, one of Synergy's vets, has played a key role in developing this platform, even filming training videos on client farms. "It adds huge value," says Neil Baker, "especially when a large proportion of new staff have very little farming knowledge."

Supporting farmers beyond the cow.

Synergy's role extends beyond clinical care. Their "Hotel Fridge" medicine delivery system ensures compliance and saves farmers time, while their TB support services, which include data analysis and advisory visits help tackle one of the industry's most persistent challenges. Farmers like Ollie Blackburn of Dillington Estate appreciate Synergy's commitment to innovation: "Their technical knowledge is of the highest quality, and their work on developing a new TB test will benefit the whole industry."

> **"Their technical knowledge is of the highest quality, and their work on developing a new TB test will benefit the whole industry."**

Mental health support is also a priority. Many Synergy vets are trained in mental health first aid and will be able to identify and signpost farmers who may need support. The practice regularly partners with groups like FCN and Women in Dairy to provide community support.

Synergy are dedicated to nurturing the future of the dairy sector and actively support Young Farmers Groups across the South-West.

A trusted name in the Southwest

Synergy's reputation is built on trust, professionalism, and results. Jono Smales, a dairy farmer in Wiltshire, sums it up: "Synergy are dedicated farm vets, and it's easy to see why farms use them over mixed practices. We haven't looked back since switching."]

Their independence allows them to remain agile and farmer focused. With 21 employee-shareholders, including Vet Techs and non-vets, Synergy ensures that those delivering the service have a stake in its success.

Virbac are proud to support practices like Synergy, who exemplify what modern veterinary care should look like: collaborative, data-driven and deeply embedded in the farming community.

Calf lung scanning with Synergy Farm Health

Nutrition: the building blocks of herd health

The power of good nutrition can at times be understated. ForFarmers' **Alison Ewing** explains how a collaborative approach to herd health can pay dividends on any dairy unit.

Alison Ewing

While herd management, genetics, and veterinary advice all play vital roles, nutrition remains the foundation upon which a healthy and profitable dairy system is built.

When cows receive the right balance of nutrients at the right time and in the right form, their fertility, immunity, transition success, and overall lifetime performance improve dramatically, explains Alison Ewing, Technical Development Manager at ForFarmers.

She says: "Despite its importance, nutrition isn't always treated as a strategic part of herd health planning. Farms where the vet and nutritionist work together as part of a wider, cohesive team are often the ones which achieve the greatest long-term success.

"A collaborative approach ensures nutritional decisions support veterinary goals, and vice versa, creating a unified strategy. When both disciplines feed into decision-making, it becomes easier to optimise fertility, minimise metabolic disorders, and maintain consistent levels of productivity throughout the year."

Feed remains one of the largest variable costs on a dairy unit but also the area with enormous potential for return on investment.

Alison says: "Suboptimal nutrition can have far-reaching consequences, from reduced conception rates to increased disease pressure and compromised milk yield. Choosing the right feed inputs is an essential component of herd health planning."

ForFarmers offers a range of nutritional solutions that integrate well into herd health plans. One product which continues to stand out is Lintec - widely recognised for its high levels of Omega-3 fatty acids and its significant influence on fertility outcomes.

Lintec helps elevate progesterone levels while naturally suppressing prostaglandin production. This hormonal shift is particularly valuable for maternal recognition of pregnancy. By balancing hormones, boosting progesterone levels, and inhibiting prostaglandin production, Lintec reduces early pregnancy loss and improves conception rates.

ForFarmers' account managers are often part of the wider farm team

> **"A collaborative approach ensures nutritional decisions support veterinary goals"**

Lintec also supports overall cow health and performance by stabilising rumen pH, reducing acid loading in the rumen, and helping improve rumen function, which in turn enhances feed efficiency.

Getting transition right

The transition phase is one of the most critical stages in the production cycle, and energy shortfalls at this time can set the tone for health issues in the following lactation. Managing transition nutrition correctly is essential for reducing problems such as milk fever, ketosis, retained cleansings and displaced abomasums.

Alison says: "When cows enter calving in optimal metabolic condition with balanced mineral and energy intakes, they transition more smoothly into lactation and are more resilient during periods of stress. This is where targeted nutritional inputs, such as TRANSLAC can make a meaningful difference."

TRANSLAC provides a simple, complete solution for close-up transition cows. This product delivers basic and complex nutrients for optimum cow performance pre and post calving, aiding calcium capture, liver health, rumen development and colostrum quality.

Foetal development

It is important to ensure adequate nutrition not just for the cow, its yield and fertility, but also foetal growth, Alison notes.

Restricted dry cow nutrition, particularly in last 30 days, leads to lower birth weights, more still births and reduced growth rates. Limiting intakes at this time can result in reduced colostrum quality and quantity and poor calf intestinal and respiratory function.

Alison says: "If nutrients are restricted during late gestation, muscle fibre numbers produced by the foetus are hampered, and calf growth performance following birth might be negatively affected as a result.

"In addition, maternal nutrient restriction may also compromise cells responsible for generating intramuscular fat resulting in carcases with lower quality and marbling scores."

Early lactation

Even after calving, an energy gap can persist, particularly in high-yielding cows. At the same time, feeding to support oestrogen production becomes important as cows approach their first post-calving ovulation.

"A failure to address this dual challenge in feeding for the energy balance and reproductive hormone support can delay cycling, increase the calving index, and compromise future fertility," says Alison.

"Ultimately, nutrition is not just another cost on the balance sheet but instead a powerful tool for improving health, fertility, and performance.

"When nutritionists, vets, and farmers work together to prioritise nutrition, the results speak for themselves: healthier cows, fewer problems, better fertility and stronger financial outcomes," Alison concludes.

The lifetime approach to improving mobility

Dairy cows can benefit from non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) as part of a gold standard approach to improve mobility.

Using a hoof tester can help to identify hidden problems in the foot

Lameness is one of the most common issues seen in the UK dairy herd with clear repercussions on animal welfare and productivity. After infertility and mastitis, lameness is the third most important cause of economic losses in the dairy industry.

Katherine Timms, veterinary surgeon and ruminant veterinary advisor at Ceva Animal Health, advises that improving mobility is a lifetime process from point of insemination to leaving the herd. When problems do occur, intervention should be carried out as soon as possible to reduce the consequences and cost.

Managing heifers

"Environmental measures such as biosecurity and hygiene to reduce infectious lesions will help ensure better mobility. Routine foot inspections and trimming, regular foot bathing and mobility scoring are also essential factors and heifers should be trained on concrete and cubicles before they enter the milking herd to promote the development of a resilient digital cushion (fat pad) in their hooves and acclimatise them to the environment," says Ms Timms.

Milking animals

She says that milking animals should be monitored and managed with a defined programme of mobility scoring, foot bathing and routine foot inspection and trimming, as required. Comprehensive records should be kept to allow decisions to be made on individual cows and to enable trends to be analysed. For example, a high incidence of cases in the first 100 days in milk can indicate problems with transition management.

Katherine Timms from Ceva Animal Health

> **"Environmental measures such as biosecurity and hygiene to reduce infectious lesions will help ensure better mobility"**

Dry cows

Ms Timms adds: "Dry cows are often overlooked, but mobility issues while dry will continue during the next lactation. Cows should be checked and may need trimming prior to dry off. Whether housed or at pasture, dry cows should be checked daily for lameness and regular foot bathing may be required.

"Body condition score (BCS) management is crucial as loss in BCS can affect the digital cushion and lameness in the subsequent lactation."

Transition cows

Transition cows returning to the herd may be challenged by the stress of calving and a return to milk production, as well as the stress of moving groups, a return to concrete and a change of diet, she says. Ensuring the cow's foot is balanced, BCS is optimal at calving and the transition diet prepares the cow for the next lactation and will reduce the likelihood of lameness in early lactation. Even subtle cases of lameness in the first 90 days after calving can lead to reduced conception rates and increased calving intervals.

Prevention and treatment

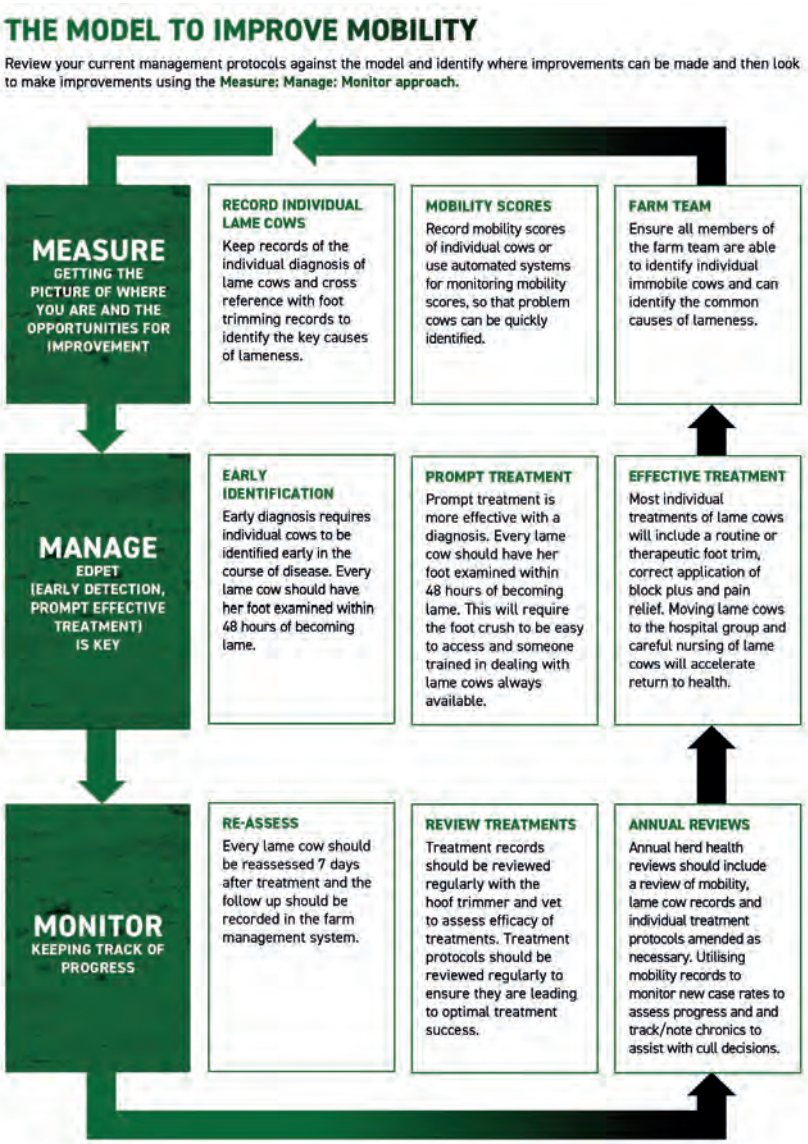
"Routine preventative and prompt treatment are key in maintaining good foot health for each cow and treatment will depend on the individual lesion with EDPET (early detection and prompt

STRIDE NATIONAL MOBILITY SURVEY

Stride is the UK dairy mobility initiative to identify producer's views on mobility, its impact on herd health and welfare and, ultimately, the business bottom line.

The 2024 Stride National Mobility Survey revealed that on many dairy farms routine preventative measures are not carried out as routinely as they could be:

- **22% foot bath milking cows less than weekly**
- **60% only lift feet and trim cows when necessary, rather than having a set routine**
- **Only 53% trim feet at drying off**
- **24% do not mobility score cows, while 53% do so quarterly or less frequently**
- **23% use non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) for all lame cows, 55% use them for severely lame cows, 8% of respondents never use pain relief when treating lame cows**



Credit: Stride Initiative

effective treatment) essential to the health and welfare of individuals within a herd."

She says that the 'measure, manage, monitor' approach is a good model to follow to improve mobility and current management protocols can be reviewed to identify where improvements can be made.

The effective treatment of individual lame cows will ensure they return to productivity quickly. The priority is early detection and prompt treatment of lesions, with all affected cows treated within 48 hours of identification. Clearly written treatment protocols should be followed for all lesion types to ensure consistency of care with staff trained in the identification of different lesions and their specific treatments.

Ms Timms says: "Ideally staff should be trained to identify lesions, provide effective and appropriate trimming, apply blocks and to correctly apply bandages. Blocks can deliver significant improvements if applied correctly as they give the affected claw rest from being weight bearing and lift the claw clear of slurry.

Use of NSAIDs

"By addressing lame cows by hoof trimming alone, the five-week cure rate is 69%. This rises to 85% cure rate when a combination of hoof trimming, block application and painkillers, such as NSAIDs, are administered."

NSAIDs play a crucial role in reducing inflammation and the subsequent recovery rate, returning the cow to walking soundly and optimum milk production. Using a zero-milk withdrawal NSAID means that milk does not have to be thrown away.

Speak to your vet about effective pain relief for lame cows.

LLM Farm Vets on farm . . .

Shropshire farmer James Willis shares how working closely with his farm vet has benefited both his staff and his cows.

Close collaboration with his farm vet on staff management and herd management protocols has paid dividends for Shropshire farmer James Willis.

Together with his father Neil, James milks 300 cross-bred cows across 500 acres at The Willey Farm, near Whitchurch.

The spring-calving herd is milked twice-a-day through a 15-aside herringbone parlour, producing average milk yields of 5,000 litres at 5.77% butterfat and 4.16% protein for Muller.

James, who also runs a property business, returned to the family farm two years ago at a time when problems with staff retention were an ongoing challenge for the business.

He says close collaboration with his vet Hannah Batty from LLM Vets, part of the VetPartners group, has helped improve this and he now has a great team of staff in place at the farm.

"Hannah and the LLM Farm Vets team are integral to our business," explains James.

"Following her recent Nuffield Farming Scholarship where she looked at how teams should be run on farms, Hannah offered to help.

"She's been a rock in helping me deal with previous staffing problems; luckily we've got a good team in place now and that's largely thanks to Hannah."

As well as providing assistance with staffing – which has included interviewing members of staff and holding staff meetings after key times such as calving – he says Hannah has also helped develop several herd management protocols.

"She has put a number of protocols in place around the likes of calving, monitoring bulling cows, and how to effectively administer drugs," explains James.

"As a result, we don't see her as much and our vet costs are down. There's also much more confidence within the team about what to look for in the cows and how to administer treatments when necessary."

He says having a good team in place, backed by strong herd management protocols, provides peace of mind while he is away from the farm for his property business.

"Running a farm, as well as another business, means I rely on the people around me and this work on staff management and protocols has truly helped the team," adds James.

"It's something that really sets Hannah and LLM as a practice apart from the rest. Hannah has a theory that happy cows mean happy people, and happy people mean happy cows. This is true for us – the herd and staff are much healthier and happier now."

www.llmfarmvets.co.uk

Fresh focus on calves drives Cumbrian demonstration farm success

Completing a Calf Health Checklist has helped sharpen calf-rearing practices at Greenrigg Farm near Wigton, Cumbria — allowing the team to fine-tune protocols and improve youngstock performance.

Johnny Graham runs the 460-head all-year-round calving Holstein Friesian milking herd alongside his father John and is one of five farmers involved in MSD Animal Health's newly launched Demonstration Farm Network. Rolled out earlier this year, the initiative is designed to provide actionable insights and highlight the value of proactive herd health management to the wider farming community.

Johnny and his youngstock team — including youngstock manager Bev Hennessy and farm manager Macie Graham — first completed the MSD Animal Health Calf Health Checklist in July 2024.

Developed in collaboration with vets and nutritionists, the Checklist, which is available for farms through their vets, consists of 10 targeted questions across five core areas, helping farms benchmark against best-practice standards. It provides a practical tool for identifying areas for improvement and monitoring progress over time.

The five core areas assessed are:

1 Setting goals and measuring performance
2 Colostrum management
3 Nutrition
4 Infection pressure
5 Healthy environment

Bev says the exercise has been instrumental in driving improvements. "The checklist focuses on key areas and helps highlight where changes can be made to further fine-tune performance," she explains.

Following the 2024 review, two main actions were prioritised:

1 **Introducing calf jackets** to reduce heat loss and cold-related stress in the winter months.
2 **Enhancing record-keeping**, including tracking mortality trends, reviewing data regularly with their vet, and recording specific causes of calf losses.

In May 2025, the team completed a follow-up Checklist and improved their score by actioning the priorities highlighted in 2024.

Bev says using calf jackets up to four weeks of age has made a noticeable difference, reducing cold stress and supporting calf health. The team also introduced a 'big sheet' to monitor calf mortality trends more clearly.

> "The checklist focuses on key areas and helps highlight where changes can be made to further fine-tune performance"

They've also recently invested in SenseHub Dairy Youngstock — a 24/7 monitoring system that uses ear tags to detect animals needing attention. It's the first solution specifically designed to monitor dairy calves and heifers during their first 12 months of life.

Johnny says early detection is crucial. "Anything we can do to pick up problems before they become serious benefits not just the calves but the entire dairy system — helping us hit target bulling weights and bring heifers into the milking herd more efficiently."

Current age at first calving is around 25 to 26 months.

Johnny adds that calf losses have reduced in recent years. "Most of our losses now occur at birth. In the past, we'd lose calves at various stages, but now we've brought that down to just the first 24 hours."

Data is now reviewed regularly with vet Iain Steele from Belle Vue Vets, who conducts quarterly reviews of calf health, supported by the vet tech team. Calves are weighed every 3–4 weeks to monitor growth rates, and blood samples are taken to assess passive immunity transfer. Total protein levels are typically above 6, with serum total protein over 5.2 g/dL the threshold associated with adequate colostrum transfer.

Dry period focus

However, Johnny believes the foundations of good calf health begin before birth — in the dry period.

"We've learned that calf health starts with the dry cows. For example, at one-point, high potassium levels in our silage led to more milk fevers, which impacted colostrum quality and caused retained placentas," he explains.

Hygiene is another priority, adds Bev. "Cleanliness in the dry period is vital. If the system gets under pressure and standards slip, you start seeing issues like navel ill and scour creeping back in. We begin with clean teats and keep everything spotless."

Vaccinations also play an important role in disease prevention. Cows are vaccinated with Bovilis Rotavec Corona, which helps to:

- Reduce the severity of diarrhoea caused by E. coli F5 (K99) and F41
- Reduce the incidence of scours caused by rotavirus
- Reduce the shedding of virus by calves infected with rotavirus or coronavirus.

The Calf Health Checklist helps identify focus areas to improve youngstock health.

Cows are also vaccinated with Bovilis Cryptium, which allows passive immunisation of calves to reduce clinical signs, including diarrhoea caused by C.parvum. For passive immunity the calf must receive adequate good quality colostrum.

"No one thing solves calf health," says Johnny. "It's like a big jigsaw, and every piece plays a part."

The team has recently installed fans in the dry cow and milk cow shed, which have helped reduce seasonal dips in conception rates and milk yield, while also improving hygiene by keeping passageways drier.

Next, the team will focus on improving their score in the Checklist by addressing the points raised in the 2025 review.

A key priority is increasing the amount of colostrum fed to calves within the first 24 hours. Currently, calves receive 4 litres within the first 12 hours, with an additional 2 litres offered if they will take it. Moving forward, the aim is to ensure calves receive at least 6 litres as a standard.

Duncan Sinclair, Associate Director Market Access at MSD says "Greenrigg Farm is a great example of how incremental improvements — guided by tools like the Calf Health Checklist — can deliver meaningful results, from reduced calf losses to more consistent heifer performance.

"The value of the Checklist lies in its simplicity and structure. It gives the farmer, those responsible for calf rearing and vets a framework to assess calf management and identify practical steps that drive progress over time.

"We're seeing real benefits when farms use the Checklist as a working document — returning to it regularly, reviewing progress, and setting new goals, just as Johnny and his team have done.

"By being open to change, embracing new technology, and working closely with their vet, the team at Greenrigg Farm are setting an example that others can learn from — and that's exactly what the Demonstration Farm Network is all about," says Mr Sinclair.

FOCUS ON YOUNGSTOCK MANAGEMENT WITH THE CHECKLIST

If you are thinking about calf health and management on your farm, you can now ask your vet for the MSD Animal Health calf health checklist tool which provides a detailed, score-based appraisal of your youngstock rearing system.
Find out more here www.msd-animal-health-hub.co.uk/dairy-calf-health

FARM FACTS – GREENRIGG FARM, WIGTON, CUMBRIA

- 460 Holstein Friesian milking cows and 400 heifers
- 11,500 litres per cow per lactation
- Housed year-round, with low yielders grazing for 6–7 months
- Milked twice daily in a 20/40 herringbone parlour
- Calving all year round with a calving index of 380 days

YOUNGSTOCK MANAGEMENT:

- Calves are initially housed in groups of three in clean, disinfected pens, bedded with straw, and fed transition milk from their dams twice daily for the first 5–7 days
- Heifer calves are moved into groups of 15 in straw-bedded loose housing and fed via an automatic milk feeder
- Beef calves are housed in groups of six in outdoor hutches.
- All calves are bedded every other day
- A strict all-in-all-out (AIAO) system operates between calf pens

About the MSD Demonstration Farm Network
The MSD Animal Health Demonstration Farm Network comprises five dairy farms across England, Scotland, and Wales. This unique initiative showcases how modern herd monitoring, proactive health management, and the use of identification systems can improve cattle health, welfare, and productivity.

In the first phase of this two-to-three-year initiative, launched in 2025, MSD Animal Health will work closely with the demonstration farmers and their vets to assess wellbeing, reproduction, and productivity outcomes on each farm, alongside each herd's disease and pathogen burden. The Network aims to provide actionable insights and demonstrate the value of proactive herd management to the wider farming community.

SenseHub is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease in animals. For the diagnosis, treatment, cure, or prevention of disease in animals, you should consult your veterinarian. The accuracy of the data collected and presented through this product is not intended to match that of medical devices or scientific measurement devices.

Easy-access data adds value on farm

Access to accurate health data, packaged in an easy format with clear messages set out 'on a plate' adds value to the vet's involvement on farm, according to NMR lead veterinary officer **Karen Bond**.

Dr Karen Bond NMR vet and Johne's Action Technical Group

Dr Karen Bond believes that having easy testing options through milk recording samples and simple to use, informative reports, has contributed to the progress made in Johne's disease control.

Routine screening for Johne's has been an option since 2010, and it is now a requirement of many milk buyers and farm assurance schemes.

"As we've learned more about the disease and its behaviour, or at least that of the Johne's-causing bacterium Mycobacterium avium subspecies paratuberculosis - MAP as it is commonly known – we've improved the reporting tools for vets and farmers and the way these are presented."

One of the most recent that is proving highly successful with farmers and their vets is the Progress Tracker dashboard and related reports, introduced in 2023. "It tells a story in a straight-forward way," says Dr Bond. "It was developed with farmers and vets in mind, to give a snapshot of progress in key areas in the herd, and to generate discussion and actions."

'Clever' bacterium

She describes MAP as very clever. "We have a grudging respect for this bacterium. It likes an easy life, and it will sit quietly in a fit healthy cow that has a strong immune system.

"But if the cow is under stress, which might be at calving or early lactation, or if she's unwell, and she's vulnerable, MAP will take its opportunity to multiply and be shed.

MAP can lie dormant in an animal for years and not create a problem until later in life. "For example, I've known 'Johne's free' cows hit their sixth lactation and suddenly return a positive test result because, for some reason, they've a weakened immune system. This is why we can't be complacent when it comes to routine screening. Neither can we say Johne's is eradicated from a herd."

It's also why control protocols must be in place to prevent new infections and mitigate the risk of the introduction of infection into the herd.

Progress Tracker provides accurate evidence on Johne's for Nathan Loewenstein (vet, on left) and farmer discussion

> **"It was developed with farmers and vets in mind, to give a snapshot of progress in key areas in the herd"**

A good measure of control plan success is seeing a decline in new detections, especially in young cows, and a steady fall in the annual average test value - ATV - which is the herd's infection rate. These two key measures are the first results that the farmer and vet should look at on NMR's Progress Tracker.

Vets can sit down with the farm team and see immediately if the level of infection is going up or down in first lactation animals. As most animals are infected as calves, these first heifers act as the 'sentinel' group.

New detections are classified as J4 and ideally, if good controls are in place, the number of J4s should be very low. If the number of cows in this J4 category, especially J4s in parity 1, is high or increasing, transmission of Johne's is still occurring and control plans should be reviewed.

The proportions of J4 cows and J4 parity 1 cows are shown in Figure 1 in the 'Progression' box.

The 'Removal' box indicates the likelihood of Red J5 cows being culled compared to their Johne's 'negative' herd mates.

Stop the flow

"While culling is an important part of Johne's management, it won't solve the herd's Johne's problem single-handed," adds Dr Bond. "We like to use the analogy of a sink full of Johne's. Trying to get rid of it by culling - or just making the plughole bigger - while still leaving the tap running and letting it fill with more Johne's, just won't work."

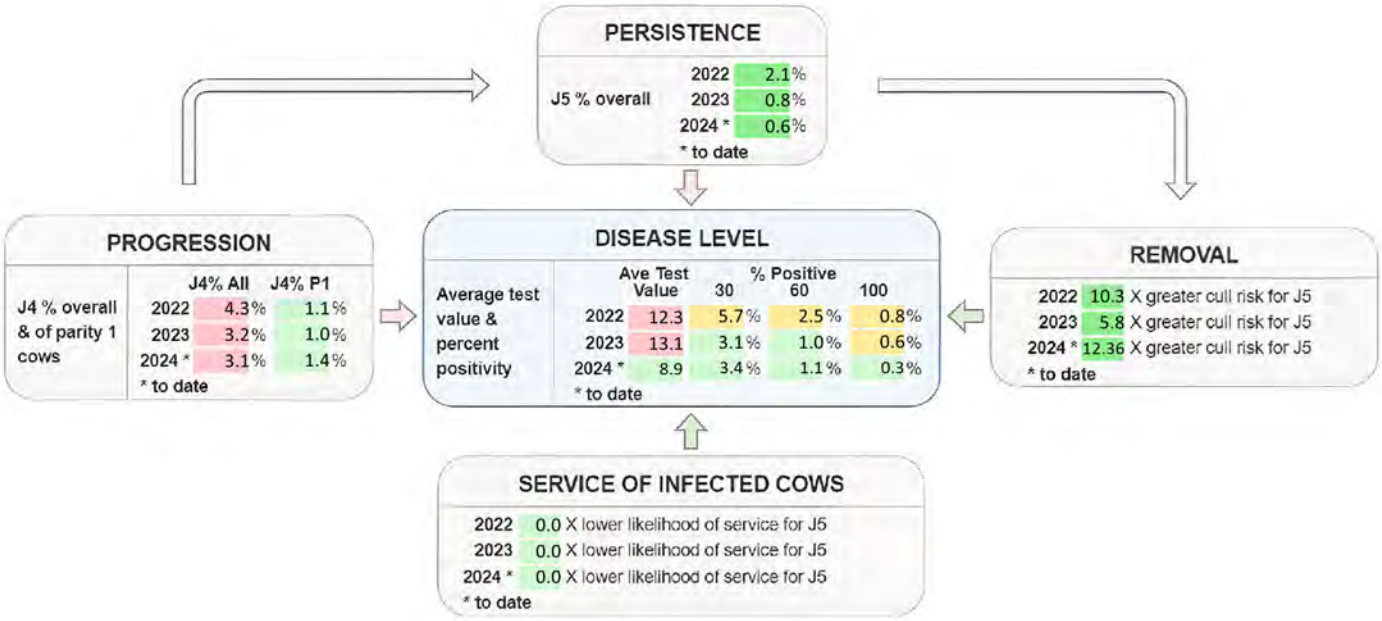
"It's a losing battle unless you block transmission too and try to stop new infections." She adds that the same is true when controlling somatic cell counts. "You can't rely on just culling high cell count cows; while this reduces the average cell count immediately, it doesn't solve the problem or prevent new infections."

Shropshire Farm Vets' Nathan Loewenstein agrees.

"For many years the focus of Johne's control has been to reduce the number of J5 – or red – cows, which are the most infected animals in the herd, particularly by milk buyers," he says.

"While this is important, as they're the major reservoir of MAP bacteria in the herd and are a threat to any youngstock coming into contact with their muck, simply culling these cows won't stem the flow of all new infections."

Figure 1 HerdWise Progress Tracker dashboard - a snapshot of a herd's Johne's status



He encourages farmers to work closely with their vets and discuss the analyses of Johne's test results, so controls that are specific to the herd can be developed. "The data analysis tools and presentation have improved so much, allowing us to make more informed management decisions for both individual and groups of animals," he says.

Mr Loewenstein typically starts his discussions on farm with a review of the Progress Tracker dashboard derived from the herd's routine Johne's test data. "This gives us a snapshot of the Johne's situation on-farm. All the key information is in one place, and it provides an instant appraisal of which way the farms control programme is heading. We can see areas requiring attention very quickly."

Going green

He looks for mainly 'green' areas on the dashboard. "This is a good sign and we look to maintain the progress, but I'll direct discussions more to the yellow and red shading where attention is needed and controls need tightening.

Controlling new infections in young calves, especially in their first month of life, is also highlighted in his discussions. "This is how we can reduce the herd's new infection rate, and it is highlighted on the Progress Tracker dashboard as J4% and J4% (parity 1).

"Progress here shows how effective the controls are at protecting replacements from infection - if they're turning off the tap, or if we need to look at actions that can reduce the risk of infecting newborn and young dairy replacements.

> **"More green areas are a good sign on the Progress Tracker."**

"This might be improving the hygiene of calving areas, removing calves from the maternity areas, or making sure no known or suspected Johne's-infected animals are present in the calving area and colostrum preparation is scrupulously clean," he says.

Strict biosecurity

Karen Bond adds that access to the Progress Tracker dashboard can be invaluable when buying in animals.

"Bringing stock on to the farm is high risk and biosecurity measures are paramount as an infected cow - or bull – can ruin years of hard work. Asking the seller to provide a herd average test value for Johne's is useful – even more useful would be a review of the Johne's summary on the Progress Tracker, and chance to review new infections verses culling infected cows."

Johne's control is a team effort and needs farmer and vet involvement for management decisions. "As vets we can never say Johne's is eradicated from a herd, but we can keep working with farmers and using the tools available to us to chip away and keep reducing infection levels.

"As an industry, we've set a target average test value of 5.5 but herds that are already there will set a lower target in order to maintain progress – just as we do with somatic cell counts."

PROGRESS TRACKER

The Johne's Progress Tracker was developed by the Johne's Action Group and PAN Livestock and is now used in Johne's screening services including NMR's HerdWise. It compares the farm's data with benchmarks. These targets are derived from analysing a large database of cow data - that are recognised as having a significant impact on Johne's infection rates. The median value and quartile ranges for each parameter are shown and can be compared with individual herd performance to identify the herd's strengths and weaknesses in their Johne's control progress. It provides vets and producers with a more powerful tool for interpreting Johne's test results than has been available in the past.

Teamwork in action

Veterinary Surgeon & Director, **Kirsty Howson** discusses how Yan Farm Health partners with farmers for herd success

Our whole approach at Yan Farm Health emphasises proactive care - planning ahead to prevent issues rather than simply reacting to emergencies.

We work closely with clients to understand their business goals and herd ambitions. While formal health planning meetings may occur once or twice a year, these sessions are far from a tick-box exercise. They form part of an ongoing, two-way dialogue that changes according to the current pressures and concerns on farm. From fertility to mastitis control, lameness management, and youngstock care, we provide practical, evidence-based solutions tailored to each farm.

Collaboration is key

We actively engage with industry professionals—consultants, nutritionists, and foot trimmers—because effective communication and teamwork lead to better outcomes for both herd health and business performance.

Preventing infectious disease is a priority

Many conditions are avoidable or manageable through vaccination, and we believe these should never compromise herd health or productivity. To support this, we conduct regular bulk milk sampling across all dairy herds, enabling us to detect changes promptly.

Vaccination protocols are then customised for each farm based on pathogen presence and herd risk factors. Our administration team plays a vital role in coordinating testing and health planning.

Youngstock health exemplifies teamwork at every level

Administrative staff manage data and scheduling, vet technicians handle on-farm tasks such as calf weighing and colostrum assessment, and veterinarians provide guidance on disease prevention, nutrition, and housing design to name just a few. Data from colostrum transfer monitoring, growth rates, and disease incidence is compiled and shared with farm teams. If issues arise—such as poor colostrum transfer—we investigate transition yard management and nutrition, often involving additional farm staff and nutritionists.

Disease management

Sometimes we have to deal with complex diseases on farm-those that we cannot provide a simple solution too such as TB. These cases are hugely challenging from a farmer perspective both emotionally and financially, they are exceedingly stressful for all involved. Although the decision making for TB control on farm falls to APHA vets here at Yan we are fully committed to supporting our clients through these disease outbreaks. There is often no simple solution to the problem but understanding the business, its pressure points combined with strong working relationships allow us to provide meaningful advice and support during these difficult times.

Exemplary service

As our business grows, we maintain a low client-to-vet ratio to ensure personalised, high-quality service. We invest lots of time in understanding new clients and their operations, recognising that the initial phase can feel overwhelming particularly with the volume of information we can be providing.

To support this, we prioritise face-to-face discussions and supplement them with clear, accessible communication via email and WhatsApp. Our farm WhatsApp groups are particularly effective for keeping all stakeholders - farm staff, vets, and the wider Yan team - up to speed and informed.

At Yan we promote a continual learning culture within our team ensuring they have plenty of opportunities to stay up to date with new developments and research. With a large range of additional qualifications/certificates between our team we are ready to support our clients whatever the conundrum from mastitis to housing, lameness to nutrition to name just a few.

In addition, we have vets with LANTRA qualifications helping them effectively teach others, we put these to good use teaching many hands-on farmer courses including calf rearing, foot trimming and DIY AI courses – running these in house allows us to the tailor the course to the specific farms and audiences. We are passionate about upskilling our clients, enabling them to provide further care to their stock when needed.

We believe that success starts with healthy livestock and informed decision-making. Our role goes beyond treating animals—we are partners in building resilient, profitable businesses for the long term.

By combining proactive veterinary care, collaborative working relationships, and a commitment to continuous learning, we aim to give farmers confidence in every aspect of herd management. Whether it's preventing disease, improving productivity, or navigating challenging situations, our team is here to provide practical solutions and unwavering support.

At Yan Farm Health, our commitment is simple: we're here to help our clients achieve long-term success through collaboration, innovation, and care.

YAN FARM HEALTH FACTS

Yan Farm Health was established in 2021 by Kirsty Howson and Andrew Crutchley. The primary objective for the veterinary practice is to 'deliver exceptional, comprehensive veterinary services that support clients in advancing livestock health and productivity.' To achieve this, Yan Farm Health have built a passionate and skilled team committed to delivering the best farm animal veterinary services in our region. By January 2026 the practice will have 6.5 full time equivalent vets providing a 24/7 service to commercial farms across Cumbria, North Lancashire and North Yorkshire. At Yan Farm Health, we partner with farmers to maintain healthy herds and thriving businesses. Each farm benefits from a dedicated, lead vet and a supporting vet to ensure continuity and tailored, consistent advice. www.yanfarmhealth.co.uk

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WHY TAKE THE RISK?

- BVD severely impacts animal welfare – affecting dairy and beef profitability, and farm sustainability.[1-4]
- Persistently infected calves are pivotal in maintenance of infection. Control efforts that fail to recognise this are doomed to fail.[5]
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1. Moennig V, Becher P. *Pathogens*. 2018;7(1):29. **2.** Yarnall MJ, Thrusfield MV. *Vet Rec*. 2017;181(13):347. **3.** Yarnall MJ, et al. Research Square. 2024 (submitted for publication). **4.** Schmitt-van de Leemput E, et al. *PLoS One*. 2020;15(10):e0240113. **5.** Moennig V, Yarnall MJ. *Pathogens*. 2021;10(10):1292. **6.** BOVELA® European Public Assessment Report. **7.** Boehringer Ingelheim sales data 2024. **8.** BOVELA® Summary of Product Characteristics (Nov 2024). **9.** Kynetec 2024. BVD sales data by value.

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