or positive cases have been detected in domestic pigs to date.

The European Union Reference Laboratory for ASF confirmed a genotype II strain, responsible for the ongoing Eurasian epidemic, and classified the isolate within a newly defined genetic group 29.[3] The detection of a genetically distinct lineage without closely related isolates highlights the complexity of the global epidemiology of ASF virus and underscores the limited understanding of its evolutionary dynamics in many geographic regions.

The re-emergence of ASF in Spain, distant from the nearest affected regions, reinforces the widely accepted view that human-mediated activities are a major driver of long-distance spread, potentially exacerbated by wild boars exploiting anthropogenic resources near human settlements.[4]

The experience in Spain illustrates both the persistent risk of long-distance introduction into previously ASF-free regions, and the critical role of early detection and coordinated control measures. Continued vigilance, strict biosecurity and prompt reporting of suspect cases are essential to prevent further spread within Spain and beyond.

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ANIMAL WELFARE

Raising concerns about lamb tail docking technique

WE would like to raise concerns about reports of adverse events associated with the use of 'ClipFitter' (Eadie Bros & Co), a novel technique for clamping the scrotum or tails of lambs, which is currently permissible throughout the UK in lambs less than seven days old (and up to three months old in Scotland without analgesic or anaesthetic).

In one such example, poll Dorset lambs from a single flock born September/October 2025 were tail docked using 'ClipFitter' (230 lambs) or elastrator rubber rings (70 lambs). The flock was owned and managed by a veterinary surgeon and the method was changed when complications with clips were observed. All other management and preventive medical measures were consistent throughout the lambing period.

> **Further understanding of the risks of clips, and how they can be mitigated, is essential before the device can become adopted more widely**

Within days of application, swelling and discharge proximal to the clips were noted prompting inspection of the flock at six to 18 days after application. Of 183 clipped lambs examined, application sites were wet in 75.4 per cent, purulent or abscessed in 43.2 per cent and hot or swollen in 7.7 per cent. Myiasis and lameness (attributed to septic arthritis) were identified in 1.1 per cent and 3.3 per cent of lambs, respectively. Antimicrobials were administered to 81.4 per cent of clipped lambs examined. All lambs were re-examined 10 days later with 17 (7.4 per cent) clipped lambs receiving further antimicrobial treatment for persistent infection at the application site and 27 (11.7 per cent) being treated for septic arthritis.

By the time of weaning, 51 (22.2 per cent) clipped lambs had been treated for septic arthritis including 12 (5.2 per cent) which were euthanased on welfare grounds. A total of 274 treatment events for septic arthritis were recorded. Arthritis was a common finding in abattoir inspection of slaughtered lambs. Lambs that had elastrator rubber rings applied were managed identically in the same groups as clipped lambs and were examined alongside them. Thirteen (18.6 per cent) and one (1.4 per cent) ringed lambs were identified with hot, wet or swollen amputation sites or septic arthritis, respectively, and all survived to weaning.

We are concerned that 'ClipFitter' is presented as an accepted, scientifically validated technique for tail docking and it now forms part of Defra's lamb tail docking and castration methods consultation.[1] We are unaware of any peer-reviewed data or reports of the technique being used extensively for tail docking and it is clear from this report that the technique has the potential to have a significant negative impact on animal welfare, farm profitability and antimicrobial stewardship.

Further understanding of the risks of clips, and how they can be mitigated, is essential before the device can become adopted more widely.

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Reference

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TIM GERAGHTY, VETERINARY CONSULTANT, RESPONDS

CLIPFITTER is a modified Burdizzo for tailing and castration of lambs in the first week of life in the UK, and up to three months in Scotland. An independent Defra-funded trial by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) demonstrated significantly reduced pain behaviour compared with rubber rings used with anaesthesia and analgesia.[1]

All methods of tailing and castration carry inherent risks, and the justification for any of these procedures should be reviewed regularly. Veterinary guidance on minimising risk remains essential. As ClipFitter is a novel method with increasing uptake, continued monitoring and open reporting of suspected adverse reactions is important so that vets can better advise on the benefits, risks and risk mitigation.

I have worked with Eadie Bros & Co to collate all known reports of suspected adverse reactions since ClipFitter became available in 2022. The data are limited and should be interpreted cautiously. Based on sales information from 2022 to 2025, ClipFitter has been used on approximately 400–500 farms for an estimated 176,000 tailing procedures and 87,000 castrations. There have been 22 reports of suspected adverse reactions (~5 per cent of users). Reported on-farm incidence ranges from less than 5 per cent to more than 50 per cent of lambs clipped. Data on total lambs affected are limited, but the apparent rate is ~0.4 per cent. Under-reporting (particularly of low-incidence events) is likely.

Clip site infection has been reported five times. Other repeatedly reported events include flystrike, wet necrosis of the scrotum and early tail amputation. Urethral occlusion has been reported once.[2]

Several measures may help reduce risk: reviewing online training material and ensuring adequate support during first use; selecting the correct clip size; ensuring good colostrum intake; maintaining environmental, operator and equipment hygiene; lamb skin cleanliness and disinfection; fly control; and leaving tails longer than the legal minimum to reduce tissue trauma.

The Banff and Buchan Monitor Farm gives one example of successful large-scale use, having clipped around 2500 lambs over three years with no issues, and reporting reduced pain behaviour and lower joint ill incidence (personal communication, 2026).

Further work is needed to understand the occurrence and risk factors for adverse reactions. In Scotland, adverse effects from any lamb castration or tail docking device can now be reported directly to SRUC Vet Services (0131 535 3130 or via the online contact form). A similar UK-wide system would support early detection and improve collective knowledge. Other suspected ClipFitter-related adverse reactions should meanwhile be reported to Eadie Bros & Co, and vets seeking further training should contact the company.

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All methods of tailing and castration carry inherent risks

Letters are not peer-reviewed, unless stated

ENVIRONMENT

Conversation on 'less but better' meat diet needed

STEVEN McCulloch's recent article raises important and timely questions about the role of the veterinary profession in addressing climate change, public health and animal welfare (*VR*, 17/24 January 2026, vol 198, p 95). Few farm vets would dispute the scale of the challenges outlined, nor the need for science-led change across global food systems.

Where many in the profession may wish to add nuance is in how those changes are framed, implemented and communicated – particularly in a UK context.

Farm vets work at the intersection of animal health, food production and environmental stewardship every day. We see firsthand that 'animal agriculture' is not a single, homogeneous activity. Different farming systems have markedly different impacts, and UK livestock production – across ruminant, monogastric and mixed systems – operates within a very different environmental, regulatory and welfare framework from many intensive global models that often dominate international datasets.

UK farmers manage around 70 per cent of the country's land, much of which is permanent pasture,

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