

Struggling for forage this autumn? Help is out there

If you're standing in the clamp or on the yard doing sums on how many weeks your silage or bales will last, you're not on your own. After the driest summer in years, forage stocks are tight nationally, and sensible, well-run farms are facing a genuine shortfall through no fault of their own. Support has been put in place specifically for this, so it's worth knowing what's available before things get critical.

Addington Fund and Forage Aid

The Addington Fund has opened 2026 Drought and Bluetongue Emergency Grants for farming families in England and Wales short of feed, fodder or straw because of the drought, bluetongue, or both. Its grant provides support, not a loan, towards essential feed costs, aimed at protecting animal welfare when the numbers don't add up. To be eligible, you'll need a CPH and SBI number, farming as your main income, and to show you can't cover the gap by selling stock or dipping into savings.

Forage Aid, run under the same charity, connects farmers with spare fodder to those without, and takes donations to buy feed for farms in real need – if you've got surplus this year, they're asking you to think of neighbours first.

Other support worth knowing about

- NFU CallFirst (0370 845 8458) – free advice for any farmer struggling
- Farming Community Network (FCN) (03000 111 999) – helpline and support for anyone finding this a tough time, practically or personally.
- ELM/SFI flexibility – Defra has temporarily relaxed cutting and grazing rules on Countryside Stewardship and SFI land, so forage, grazing and bedding can be taken this year without affecting payments. Check with your agreement holder if this applies to you.

Test and target sheep wormers this Autumn

Most of us know the theory by now, not every sheep needs worming and treating the whole group as routine just burns through wormer and speeds up resistance. But knowing it and doing it are two different things, especially when you're stretched for time and it's quicker to just dose the lot.

FEC testing, done for you

Rather than guessing whether a burden's there, bring us a set of fresh dung samples (or we can help collect them) and we'll run faecal egg counts to tell you exactly what you're dealing with – and whether treatment is needed at all this round.

If you'd rather not spend time assessing growth rates, body condition and dag scores yourself, we can do a run through the group with you or talk you through what to look for so it becomes a five-minute job at handling. Either way, the sheep needing treatment get picked out accurately.

Checking your wormers are still working

It's also a good time of year to check whether your wormer is doing its job. We offer post-drench FECs, a simple recheck a week or two after treatment to confirm it's clearing the burden, plus full resistance testing if you want a clearer picture of which products are still effective on your farm.

If targeted worming is something you know you should be doing but haven't quite got round to, give us a call. We can run the tests, help with the picking out, and make sure treatments are working as hard as they should be.

There's still time to use your Animal Health and Welfare Review funding for this specific reason – reduction testing is included and we can talk about targeted treatments and wider flock health. Topics of your choosing.

What makes a disease notifiable and what can we learn?

A recurring theme in recent discussions around Bluetongue is that farmers recognise the importance of disease control but understandably become frustrated by the practical consequences, particularly movement restrictions and testing requirements. However, this cost of reporting is crucial to prevent an outbreak, like we're seeing with Bluetongue right now. Notifiable diseases are notifiable for a good reason and as vets, we don't deliver this information lightly - finding the balance between disease prevention and business disruption is tough.

A notifiable disease is one that must be reported to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) when it is suspected or confirmed. This legal requirement applies even if there is only suspicion of disease and failure to report a notifiable disease is an offence.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) reviews global disease data to determine how a disease should be classified. The information they review includes:

- Potential for international spread
- Extent of the impact on animal health and production
- Mortality rates
- Economic consequences
- Risks to wildlife populations
- Risks to human health where zoonotic transmission is possible

The cost of getting it wrong: Foot and Mouth Disease:

Few events demonstrate the importance of disease reporting better than the 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak. The outbreak led to the slaughter of approximately 6.5 million animals and is estimated to have cost the UK economy around £8 billion.

Beyond the direct impact on farms, rural tourism was severely affected, livestock movements were halted and export markets were disrupted for months. One of the key lessons learned was that speed matters. Rapid identification, reporting and control measures are essential for limiting the spread.

Avian Influenza shows the ongoing threat:

Government figures show that the UK experienced:

- 158 confirmed cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza during the 2021-22 outbreak season.
- 207 confirmed cases during the 2022-23 outbreak season.
- 82 confirmed cases during the 2024-25 outbreak season.

These outbreaks have resulted in the culling of large numbers of poultry to prevent further spread.

In January 2025, a single outbreak in Shropshire led to more than one million laying hens being culled and was reported as the largest single avian influenza outbreak seen in the UK; highlighting how one infected premises can have consequences far beyond the farm gate, affecting supply chains, egg production and the wider poultry sector.

Bluetongue:

As of August 2026, government reports showed 493 confirmed BTV-3 cases across Great Britain, with cases identified in sheep, cattle and camelids. APHA also reported more than 2,400 potential cases under investigation. Without early detection, vaccination, testing and movement controls, diseases such as Bluetongue can establish themselves more widely and become significantly more difficult to manage.

Reporting suspicion of a notifiable disease is not a requirement that just creates more paperwork. It helps to protect neighbouring farms, animal welfare, trade and farm businesses.

What to do in the face of notifiable disease cases:

The key to successful notifiable disease containment is taking proactive measures to protect your herd and the wider farming sector. The best things you can do are:

- Maintain strong biosecurity
- Monitor stock regularly
- Familiarise yourself with the signs of key notifiable diseases that would affect your business (i.e. those relevant to the animals you keep).
- Purchase stock responsibly - pre-movement testing?
- Contact us promptly if something unusual is observed.
- Report suspicions of a notifiable disease immediately.

Remember, reporting a suspicion does not automatically mean disease is present. It simply ensures that appropriate investigations can take place before a potential problem becomes a major outbreak.



Source: APHA - Bluetongue symptoms in sheep

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Isolating sick calves

One calf in the group or main shed starts scouring, or you notice a cough at the back of the shed. It doesn't look like much on day one. Ten days later, half the pen or downwind calves are affected and you're working through a course of treatments. Autumn is exactly the time of year this happens, and isolating that first sick calf early is a beneficial prevention technique.

Calves are more exposed to disease pressure once the weather turns. Housing goes up earlier, ventilation gets shut down to keep sheds warm, and temperature swings between damp mornings and milder afternoons put extra strain on young immune systems. Pneumonia and scour organisms spread far more easily once calves are back indoors in closer contact, sharing air space and, often, the same buckets and feeding equipment. A bug that might fizzle out at grass can run through a shed in days if conditions are right for it.

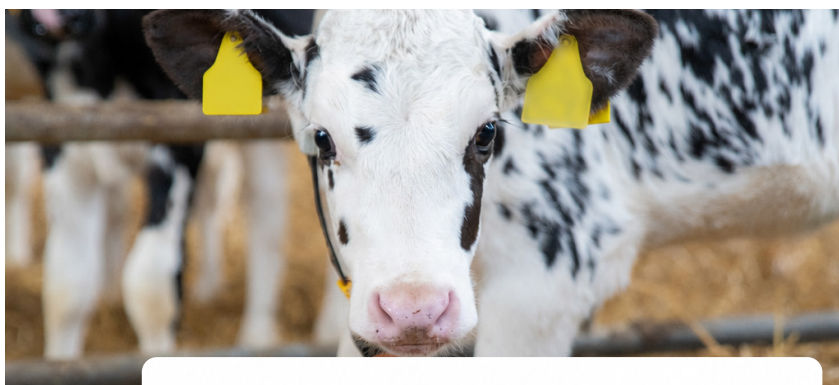
Why isolation works

Separating a sick calf is about buying time and limiting spread while you get on top of the problem. A calf with scour is shedding huge numbers of pathogens into bedding and onto surfaces; one with pneumonia is coughing infectious droplets into the air around it. Moving that calf to its own pen cuts down the dose of infection every other calf in the group or shed is exposed to. It also makes monitoring and treatment far easier – you can see appetite, temperature and demeanour clearly, without wading through a group to find the one that isn't right.

Make it practical

You don't need a purpose-built isolation facility to do this well. A spare pen, a hurdled-off corner, or even a solid-sided calf hutch works, if it's away from the main airflow of the shed and has its own feeding equipment. Boots and overalls should be changed or disinfected between the isolation pen and the main group (something we could take from pig and poultry set ups) and that calf should be seen last, not first. Early separation, even for 24–48 hours while you assess things, could stop a single case becoming an outbreak.

If you're seeing early signs of scour or respiratory disease, please give us a call – early diagnosis means the right treatment goes to the right calf, and isolating promptly protects the rest of the group while we work out what's going on.



1. ISOLATE EARLY

Move sick calves to a dedicated isolation area at the first sign of illness.



2. CLEAN & DISINFECT THOROUGHLY

Clean and disinfect the isolation area between calves. Focus on high-touch surfaces.



3. USE DEDICATED EQUIPMENT

Use separate buckets, feeders and equipment for sick calves only.



4. PRACTISE GOOD BIOSECURITY

Change clothing and footwear or use boot dips when entering and leaving the isolation area.



5. ENSURE GOOD VENTILATION

Fresh air helps recovery. Maintain good airflow without draughts.



6. MONITOR & RECORD

Monitor calves closely, follow treatment plans and keep records of cases.

Fertility prep for goats

Autumn is when goats naturally come into breeding condition. Dropping daylight is the trigger, for does and bucks alike. If you're planning kids next spring, now's the time to look both animals over properly. A bit of preparation now, on both sides, makes for a smoother season and a better chance of a strong kid crop.

Is your buck fit for the job?

Most bucks are perfectly capable, but it's easy to miss a problem until weeks have gone by and does still aren't settling. Look for a buck in moderate body condition; not lean, not overly fat, sound feet, no signs of lameness or general ill health. A strong, active buck with plenty of interest in the does is a good sign, but interest alone doesn't guarantee fertility, so if you're using a new buck, or one that had a disappointing season last year, it's worth having him checked before he goes in with the does.

How do you know she's ready?

Does cycle roughly every three weeks through autumn and winter, each heat lasting a day or so. Look out for restlessness, a flicking or "flagging" tail, increased calling or bleating (especially towards the buck pen), a slight vaginal discharge, and reduced appetite. Some does will also mount other goats or stand to be mounted themselves. If you're unsure, introducing the buck (or letting does get scent of him) often brings signs on more clearly – he's usually your best heat detector.

Nutrition ahead of breeding – especially after this year's drought

This year's dry summer has left many of us short of decent grazing and good-quality forage, and that matters more than usual heading into breeding. Thin does, or those that have been living on stretched or poorer-quality forage, often don't cycle as reliably and can ovulate fewer eggs. A short period of improved feeding in the two to three weeks before you introduce the buck can help address this, using whatever quality energy source is practical: a bit of concentrate, better hay, or specialist goat feed. It doesn't need to be complicated or expensive, but it

does need to start early enough to make a difference, and any change should be introduced gradually to avoid digestive upset. If your forage stocks are tight this autumn, it's worth talking to us about the best way to prioritise your breeding females.

If you'd like your buck checked or want some guidance on getting does into the right condition for breeding this year, give us a call – a bit of planning now goes a long way come kidding time.



If you would like more information on what we've discussed in this month's newsletter, please speak to any of our farm veterinary team.

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