



## MARCH 2026

### Ewe Colostrum Quality - Should it be Measured?

We are all aware of the importance of colostrum, but if you think that it's impractical to monitor colostrum quality in sheep, have a look at the article referenced below which proves it can be done in commercial flocks.

64 Welsh flocks collected colostrum from 10 ewes at the start and end of lambing, giving a total of 1295 samples which were tested by the individual farmers using a Brix refractometer. 76% of samples had a result above 26.5% and were classed as good quality. There was variation both within and between flocks with all 20 samples classed as good quality in only 9 flocks.

Timely ingestion of colostrum is vital in preventing hypothermia, starvation and septicaemia with an added benefit of reducing antibiotic use. Most pre-weaning lamb deaths occur in the first week of life and average perinatal mortality is estimated to be 15 to 20%. If the results from this study are representative it is worth looking for ways to improve colostrum quality.



Adequate energy and protein supply in the last three weeks of gestation are crucial for the production of good quality colostrum. The importance of getting nutrition right was emphasised by some of the key findings that impacted colostrum quality:

- **Ewes scanned for multiple lambs that did not receive supplementary feeding were more likely to produce lower quality colostrum.** The effect was greater for triplet bearing ewes with only 52% of samples classed as good quality compared to 84% for triplet-bearing ewes that were receiving supplementary feeding.
- Easy access to supplementary feed is important. **When available trough space was less than the recommended minimum of 45cm/ewe, only 68% of colostrum samples were classed as good quality.** This increased to 84% when trough space was >45cm/ewe.
- **A silage crude protein of >120g/kg was shown to have a positive effect with 85% of colostrum samples classed as good quality.**
- **Less than half of ewes recorded as difficult to strip produced good quality colostrum samples.** Previous undetected mastitis was suggested as a possible explanation for this, with inadequate protein nutrition a potential risk factor for this.

### Leptospirosis in Cattle

*Leptospira hardjo* infection is endemic on many UK dairy and beef herds and can cause losses such as milk drop, sub-fertility and abortion. It is also an important zoonotic disease vaccination should be the norm in herds with known risk of infection to help protect farm staff. We have plenty of Spirovac vaccine in stock for herds to carry out their annual booster vaccination.



If your herd's fertility performance was disappointing last year, or there were any abortions then we can carry out some subsidised testing for leptospirosis, IBR and BVD, or we may be able to access some Farming Connect funding for Welsh Farms (see overleaf).

## Orf Infection in Sheep

Orf commonly affects the lips, mouth, and surrounding skin of sheep but can also affect the feet (coronary band). It occurs most commonly in young lambs, but occasionally can affect older sheep causing lesions on the teats and udder of nursing ewes. The virus causes sores to form, which encrust before scabbing over and then falling off. The underlying skin heals without scarring. This cycle takes approximately 4-5 weeks. Lambs lose condition as they are reluctant to feed and it is too painful for ewes with teat lesions to feed suckling lambs. Those with foot lesions will be lame. Skin sores may become infected by opportunistic bacteria, causing secondary infection (eg. strawberry footrot).

Infection occurs by direct contact with the virus which is highly resistant and can survive in dried scabs in the environment for years. Purchased carrier sheep could also introduce Orf to a previously clean flock. Grazing of coarse pastures, thistles or stubbles may predispose to infection with orf as oral/skin abrasions increase the potential for the virus to gain entry.



Correct site for vaccine administration. Vaccinate behind the elbow, in the hairless skin of the axilla using a single 4-5cm scratch.

- Scabigard vaccine should only be used in flocks where Orf virus infection has been confirmed
- Lambs can be vaccinated at any age from birth prior to the period of infection risk
- Pregnant ewes should be vaccinated 7-8 weeks prior to lambing
- Do not vaccinate ewes <7 weeks prior to lambing
- Do not vaccinate during wet weather conditions
- Ewes that are vaccinated prior to lambing should not be moved to the proposed place of lambing until sufficient time has passed for the vaccination scabs to drop off (minimum of 7 weeks)

Watch the video on how to use Scabigard: <https://bcove.video/4hxyISi>

### Farming Connect Funding

Farming Connect have advised us of funding available for Animal Health Clinics for a limited period (until the funding ends, or until mid-March – whichever comes first).

There is £350 available for each clinic, and this can include all kinds of tests, examinations or veterinary advice (except TB, BVD, MV, Genomic Testing, Health Schemes, sheep scanning, cattle PD, or anything connected with pedigree society status). The types of issues we would typically investigate at this time of year include abortions, lamb and calf scour, pneumonia, joint ill, high barren rates, ill-thrift and bull fertility testing. However, other issues are not excluded, so if you have a problem and farm in Wales, please give us a call.

### STAFF NEWS



You may have noticed that Elinor Bowen has returned to us after her maternity leave. It has been great to have her back on the team, but sadly for us Elinor has decided to embark on a new career in Dental Nursing. We wish her all the best in her new career and thank her for all her hard work over the last 11 years.

### Joke of the Month

What do you call a cow that you can't see?

Ca-moo-flaged!

