



## May 2026 Newsletter

### MilkSure and Red Tractor medicines course

#### Upcoming Training Courses:

We're running a MilkSure course on **Tuesday 12th May at 11:30am at our Bridgwater branch** a great opportunity to stay up to date and compliant.

Reminder for Arla Care members:  
Part 1 Must be completed every 4 years  
Part 2 Must be refreshed annually

Red Tractor Medicines course:

These are required every 5 years and are compulsory for anyone administering medicines and recording them in the farm medicines book.



#### Upcoming dates:

Thursday 7th May @ 2pm – Bridgwater office  
Monday 18th May @ 2pm – Ilminster office  
Get in touch to book your place or find out more.

### Nematodirus

As we move through April into May, Nematodirus risk is now high across Somerset. Current forecasts indicate that peak hatch occurred in late March to early April, with some inland or slightly higher ground areas peaking into mid-April.

This means we are now entering the main disease risk window, with clinical cases expected from mid-April onwards and into May.

Which lambs are most at risk locally?

- Lambs 6–12 weeks old
- Grazing pasture that carried lambs in spring 2025
- Early-born lambs now eating significant grass
- Twin lambs or those on poorer milking ewes

Somerset's early grass growth can mean lambs start grazing earlier, increasing exposure risk.

Clinical signs to watch for

Nematodirus can develop rapidly and requires prompt action. Watch for:

- Sudden profuse watery scour
- Dehydration (sunken eyes, skin tenting)
- Dullness and reduced thrive
- Lambs gathering at water troughs
- Sudden deaths in severe cases

It is important to note that disease occurs before egg shedding, so faecal egg counts are not reliable early on.

Key control points for Somerset farms

- Avoid high-risk pasture (fields grazed by lambs last year)
- Time treatment correctly (typically ~2 weeks after peak hatch)
- Use appropriate wormers (group 1/white drenches (benzimidazoles) remain first-line)
- Consider other causes of scour (especially coccidiosis (requires different treatment))
- Account for field variation (higher/north-facing ground around Exmoor fringes may be slightly lat-

## Bluetongue Update

In the last year there have been 330 identified cases of bluetongue in the UK; a significant number of these in the South. Many have observed this number is much lower than the Netherlands, which in 2024 had almost 9000 cases, leading to an estimated loss of 5% of their national sheep flock, a 40% increase in premature births, 10% increase in abortions, and a doubling of mortality in calves up to 2 years old. There have been many reasons suggested for why the UK didn't suffer as many cases as expected, however a huge amount of credit is owed to farmers in high risk areas who vaccinated their flocks and herds, which is likely to have reduced the impact bluetongue had.

### Bluetongue facts

Bluetongue virus (BTV) is spread by infected *Culicoides* midges. Livestock will become viraemic (infectious) 2-7 days after being bitten by an infected midge and sheep can remain viraemic for 4 weeks, while cattle can remain viraemic for 8-9 weeks. Due to the lower mortality than sheep and longer viraemia, cattle are often referred to as reservoirs, however they can still experience clinical signs. Clinical signs vary and infected animals may not show all signs, however they include:

*\*in sheep fatalities can reach 75%, sheep < 1 year old are 13x more likely to die*

Sheep and lambs	Cattle	Newborn stock
Coronitis	Coronitis	Blindness
Fever	Muzzle and teat lesions	Spinal abnormalities
Recumbency	Milk drop of 1L/day for up to 9 weeks	Neurological deficits
Sloughing hooves	Corneal oedema (clouding of the eye)	Increased mortality
Swollen lips, bottle jaw and hypersalivation	Increased frequency of premature calves and abortions	Dummy calves
Death*	Hypersalivation	

The main serotype of BTV in England is BTV-3 which has been identified in 297 cases, there have also been 4 cases of BTV-8, and 7 cases with combined BTV-3 and BTV-8.

### Prevention

Although bluetongue is spread by biting midges, ectoparasiticides are not sufficient to prevent infection, as the midge needs to bite the animal before it is killed, which can spread BTV. There is no specific treatment for bluetongue, so infected animals will be symptomatically treated or culled if clinical signs are severe.

The best way to reduce the impact of bluetongue is vaccination. The vaccine is safe for pregnant animals; it also doesn't cause infertility of rams and bulls, although it may cause a temporary increase in temperature which can transiently decrease fertility.

The Bultavo vaccine effectively reduces viraemia and prevents clinical signs caused by BTV-3, 21 days after a single 1ml dose in sheep, and 21 days after completion of a primary course (2 x 1ml doses) in any other species. *The VMD is currently determining if a single 1ml booster every 12 months is sufficient to maintain immunity in cattle.*

Although flock and herd vaccination is a decision that will be made based on individual risk, it is recommended to vaccinate all breeding males, as BTV can be spread in seminal products. For the remainder of the herd and flock the Battle Bluetongue vaccination decision making tool is available, and can help.

## Cholivite

We now stock a product from Barbican Animal Health that can help a cow's liver deal with excess body fat mobilisation and negative energy balance. Barbican is headed by vet James Husband who regularly speaks on the topic of dairy cow nutrition and is an RCVS "Specialist in Cattle Health and Production".

The bolus contains rumen protected methionine and choline as well as vitamin E. Many of you have used these products previously as they were some of the active ingredients in the "Dairy Boost" tubes.

When a fit and healthy cow calves down, some fat is mobilised but the liver "burns" this in an efficient way to provide a lot of energy around calving. In some cows, the liver can become clogged with fat causing inappetence, rapid weight loss, depression and milk drop. This is colloquially known as "fatty liver syndrome".

Both choline and methionine are crucial in exporting fat out of the liver as well as supporting healthy metabolism of fat within the liver. The boluses also contain Vitamin E, an anti-oxidant, which helps cows cope with the metabolic stress of fatty liver.

Cholivite boluses can also help in cases of ketosis, which can occur with or without fatty liver. Typically, the cows "at risk" that might benefit from Cholivite boluses include fat cows, those carrying twins or any that have a condition that might lower dry matter intake. The boluses can be given at calving or when clinical signs appear, providing 5 days of metabolic support. The boluses cost £9.95 + VAT each and the standard treatment is 2 boluses.

As ever, the most important step is to manage dry cows effectively, please contact one of our offices to discuss dry cow nutrition and management. Prevention is always better than cure!

