



Newsletter April 2026

Welcome

“Busy?” is the usual opener from many of our clients at this time of year. My response is normally, “Of course — if we aren’t busy now, we never will be!”

Yes, the lambing and calving season is upon us, but we’re well staffed and ready for the challenge. We now have three vets on duty each night and weekend so that we can provide the best service possible.

From past experience, we’ve learnt that staffing levels make the biggest difference between a bearable and a terrible working environment. A few lambing seasons ago we were down two vets — one with a rugby injury and another with a bad back — and the rest of us only just managed to make it through.

The importance of good staff, and keeping them, is something our business and yours have very much in common. We’re not afraid to admit that we’ve made mistakes along the way, and we’re always trying to learn from them.

With that in mind, later this month we’re hosting a meeting for farm owners and managers with an expert speaker on attracting and retaining good staff. It’s slightly outside our usual veterinary topics, but we hope it will be just as useful.

Mark Stott

Leptospirosis in Dogs



Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection transmitted from livestock and rats through urine and contaminated water. Symptoms of the disease can vary from mild to very severe and can be fatal especially for young dogs. It often affects primarily the kidneys but can involve other organs.

Signs can be variable but often include: lethargy, high temperature, vomiting, diarrhoea, inappetence, stiffness, dehydration and yellowing of membranes.

Prompt diagnosis and treatment improves the chances of a good outcome. Treatment involves a long course of

antibiotics with severe cases require intensive fluid therapy and hospitalisation. It is zoonotic so can be spread to humans through bodily fluids.

Good news is there is an annual vaccination that can be given to prevent it! Protection from the vaccine only lasts for 12 months so does need to be topped up annually. Give the office a call to discuss getting your farm collies covered!

Kathrine Muller Jones

Included this month

- **Lepto in Dogs** - Kathrine Muller Jones
- **Medicine Supply and Rugby**— Sarah Harker
- **Castration and tail docking consultation**— Sarah Harker
- **Turnout Advice** – Jim McKinstry
- **Farming Equipment and Technology Fund**- Liusaidh Troughton
- **News and Diary Dates**

Medicine Supply and Rugby!

At the beginning of March, Finbarr and I had a trip to Southern Ireland for a couple of days to visit the headquarters of Duggan Veterinary Supplies. We gained an insight into their business which supplies some of the drugs and equipment that we use on a daily basis. Recent years have seen some difficulties in sourcing the products that we need, when we need them. By working closely with our suppliers, understanding their businesses and them ours, we strive to do our best to minimise supply problems.

The trip was attended by another 30 or so senior staff from independent veterinary practices across the UK and Ireland, creating much opportunity for sharing of ideas and experiences. This is invaluable in helping us to reflect on our own business and keep it moving in what we hope is the right direction. We were also very lucky to share in the Irish hospitality with wonderful company, food and drink, and a bit of Six Nations Rugby!

Closer to home, we work with Dalehead Vets at Settle and Bellevue Vets at Wigton as the FarmVet Network to strengthen our individual businesses through buying capacity, sharing of ideas and training initiatives etc. Andrew Linney from Dalehead was also on the Ireland trip.

We have a business that is rooted locally but with national and international connections that allow us to meet client needs as best we can. By being proudly independent, we have the freedom to make the decisions that we think are right for the future of our business and yours. April marks the first anniversary of the expansion of the Farmgate Vets director's team from 2 to 6, bringing different characters and ideas to the table. As we continue to evolve, we are excited to take our independent business forwards as best we can.

Sarah Harker



Government Consultation on Castration and Tail-docking of Lambs

A UK government consultation on proposed changes to sheep castration and tail-docking legislation closed on 9 March. This is the latest in a series of discussions that began in 1994, aiming to improve sheep welfare while maintaining realistic, practical solutions for farmers. Stakeholders were invited to comment as individuals or via organisations such as the Sheep Veterinary Society, NFU and NSA.



The debate centres on avoiding castration and tail docking where the farming system allows but, where procedures are necessary, choosing techniques that minimise suffering. Rubber rings cause pain because the nerves are not severed instantly. Alternatives include clip-fitter clips, which cut the nerves immediately, and devices such as Numnuts, which deliver local anaesthetic at the same time as applying the ring. Before any legislative change, these methods would need adequate trialling across different farming systems to confirm they are safe, effective and practical.

There is also debate about the age at which lambs should be tail docked and castrated. In England and Wales, legislation requires that, if a rubber ring is used, lambs must be under seven days old; in Scotland the limit is three months. New proposals ask whether ring application should be prohibited in the first 24 hours of life, to allow lambs time to suck and bond with the ewe. It has also been suggested that tail docking and castration could be permitted up to three months of age across all nations, provided appropriate local anaesthetic and pain relief are used. A key challenge is the limited availability of licensed analgesic medicines for sheep, and the need for careful dosing in young lambs to avoid side effects.

Whatever decision is made, some form of training is likely to be required to demonstrate competency.

My impression is that many issues will have been raised, so legislation is unlikely to change immediately. At farm level, continue to do what suits your system, but stay open-minded: we should keep questioning routine practices and make changes where they improve lamb welfare while remaining practical and cost-effective for the farmer.

On tail docking specifically, overly short tails increase the risk of vaginal prolapse and prolonged labour in ewes, because nerves supplying the vagina and vulva can be damaged. It is a legal requirement that the tail is left long enough to cover the anus and vulva. If short tails are contributing to problems at lambing time, that is all the more reason to follow the law. If you keep your own replacements, leaving a little extra length on gimmer lambs is sensible. If you buy in replacements, try to purchase animals that have been tail docked appropriately.

Sarah Harker

Turn Out Advice from Jim

Spring is hopefully on its way the muck will be getting shifted from round the doors and the cattle will be getting turned out. It is a great feeling to be letting them out and not to dampen the moment, we need to make sure the cattle are ready for what is waiting out there for them.

Make sure **vaccinations are up to date** as this is the easiest time to jab them when they are still in the shed. Lepto and BVD is best to do now before heifers that be bred over the summer go out.

Bluetongue vaccination should be considered for cattle that will be getting bred over the summer to protect them against this disease. We are seeing fertility problems with blue tongue over the country, so it is something that needs to be considered.

Lungworm is a constant threat and there is no better way to protect against it than to vaccinate with HUSKVAC pre turnout. This gives lifelong protection as long as the cattle get exposure to lungworm every year.

Strategically using wormers is another way to protect against lungworm. This can be done by regular worming through the summer, treating when the first cattle start to cough or using a long-acting wormer at turnout to protect cattle for 4 months. Have a chat with one of us about what would suit your system the best.

Fly protection needs to be started early so an application of pour on now and repeated as often as the product says through the summer to keep fly numbers down. For housed animals we are seeing some good results with the Bestico natural fly control.

Growing cattle can also benefit for a **trace element bolus** at turnout especially if they are being turned out onto marginal grazing. We have some good boluses and injections to give the cattle what they need.

Hopefully with a wee bit of planning the cattle will have a good summer and come back in as fit as fire. **Jim McKinstry**



The Farming Equipment and Technology Fund.

The Farming Equipment and Technology Fund re opened on 17 March, offering funding for more than 290 items across three areas: Animal Welfare, Productivity and Slurry Management. Grants range from £1,000 to £25,000 within each theme and cover 40–50% of item costs.

A particularly useful option for many farms is a cattle weighing system. While several automatic and manual systems are available, weigh bars for the crush are often the simplest choice. Weighing systems offer several key benefits for both beef rearing units and suckler herds:

- **Accurate dosing:** Knowing each animal's precise weight ensures correct dosing, preventing underdosing—which can lead to resistance and reduced effectiveness—and overdosing, which can be harmful and costly.
- **Monitoring daily liveweight gain:** Regular weights help assess whether nutrition is correct, whether animals are receiving enough feed, or whether issues such as parasites, trace element deficiencies or disease may be limiting performance.
- **Batch comparison:** Performance varies between groups. Tracking weights helps identify which batches or sources deliver the best results for the investment, informing future purchasing decisions.
- **Identifying productive cows:** In suckler herds, weights taken from calves—such as birth and weaning weights—provide a reliable reflection of each cow's productivity. This helps highlight consistently high performing cows and identify “passengers” whose productivity may have declined unnoticed.



With just two key weights per calf, farmers can calculate kilograms of beef produced per cow and use year-on-year comparisons to guide culling decisions and maintain herd efficiency.

For full details on eligible items and the application process, visit the website- [Apply for the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund \(FETF\) 2026 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/farming-equipment-and-technology-fund-2026)

Liusaidh Troughton

A warm welcome to Nicola Swindlehurst



I'm Nicola, some of you may know or recognise me or have spoken to me on reception already having joined the Farm Gate team in January this year. I am from Underbarrow, near Kendal where I farm in partnership with my husband Peter, two children and my father in law, where we run 150 Holsteins plus followers and 600 sheep.

Before I started at Farm Gate I worked in the vet nursing teams at a couple of small and mixed animal practices. More recently, to fit in with my family life I have been working in a management training company in admin and accounts.

I am looking forward to being that friendly, familiar face at J36 and getting to know our clients and their requirements. In my spare time I am busy with farming and family life, but outside of this I do

enjoy a nice meal out with family and friends and a good giggle, as I don't take myself too seriously and love a bit of banter!

Huge Charity Effort!

In September, Finbarr and Kathrine are taking on the London to Paris triathlon as part of a relay team to raise money for Aspire, a charity that works to support people following spinal injuries. The pair of idiots will be running from London to Dover, swimming the channel and then cycling to Paris. As part of the fundraising they are holding a promise auction on May 16th. Everyone is welcome and if you are able to donate anything from a bale of hay to a weekend away it would be massively appreciated. There is no donation too big or small! The catalogue will be

released in April so you will have chance to plan your bids over a brew, we hope to see many of you there!



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Diary Dates



Managing, Motivating and Retaining Farm Staff—Tuesday 28th April 2026
11am—2.45pm

Lancaster Auction Mart Café (The Bull Pen), Wyresdale Rd, Lancaster, LA1 3JQ

A meeting for Farm owners and managers, relevant to family farms and farms employing multiple external staff. Our speaker, Nollaig Hefferman is a dairy farmers daughter from Ireland with a good understanding of the work ethic and demands of working in Agriculture. **To book your place please call the office or e mail linda@farmgatevets.com.**



Understanding Veterinary Medicines (Red Tractor Course)

Friday 8th May 2026 12.30 pm—2.30pm Ulverston Auction Mart Cafe, North Lonsdale Terrace, Ulverston, LA12 9AU (Lunch Included). £40 plus VAT including lunch and certificate.

To book please contact the practice or e mail linda@farmgatevets.com

Lancaster Office

Tel: **01524 60006**

Open 8:30am-5pm

Monday-Friday

9am—12noon Saturdays

CLOSED Sundays

J36 Kendal Office

Tel: **015395 67899**

Open 8:30am-5pm

Monday-Friday

9am—12noon Saturdays

CLOSED Sundays

Sedbergh Office

Tel: **015396 20335**

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