

Newsletter

March 2026



Welcome

Here we are in March already and lambs are just starting to be born. We have less and less sheep lambing in January and February as there is no price advantage for Easter lambs these days.

Pneumonia and calf problems have been keeping us occupied. I do get frustrated that we put more and more effort into calves and we still get problems. A subject I could write lots about but are we getting softer calves with the genetics we are using? Colostrum is still the foundation for calf and lamb health, and we are talking about the different products out there for them.

Here is to a busy month of March with lots of night calls for us. If you see a vet looking tired please give them a strong coffee and a kit-kat as that usually gives them a good perk up!

Jim McKinstry

Bluetongue

Time to get my crystal ball out again. What is going to happen with bluetongue disease this year? We have had cases of dummy calves born off unvaccinated suckler cows that have had to be put to sleep. A big loss for those farms. Sheep scanning results have in some cases been disappointing. Don't get me wrong other things could be at play, but undiagnosed BTV could be a cause for concern.

We know Bluetongue is here and it is in our midge population. Will it be a problem? Who knows. It could be and it has been for the farms with dummy calves being born. Personally, I will be boosting all our cows, lambing sheep and tupps as any losses, even in our small herd and flock will be much greater than the £2.50ish per dose it costs to vaccinate them.

Bluetongue is so difficult to predict as it is the midge that spreads it and not other animals. High fences and locked gates have no effect on it. Over the country there have been clinical cases and fertility problems in flocks and herds. There have also been dairy herds that have lost production as the virus went through them. There have been cases all over the country and it has also popped up in Northern and Southern Ireland, so the midges do like to get about.

What it boils down to is if you think the investment to protect your animals is worth it or do you just risk it. If you get problems, there is not a lot you can do other than let it work its way through. If you do not have any problems and have not vaccinated, like any disease you have saved the money on the vaccine. It is your choice.

Jim McKinstry

Included this month

- **Blue Tongue -** Jim McKinstry
- **FerAppease-** Alex Vayro
- **NSAID's at Calving & Lambing-** Fraser Jackson
- **M.bovis Testing-** Beth Griffiths
- **Colostrums -** Liusaidh Troughton
- **Worming Sheep at Lambing-** Sol Elliott
- **News and Diary Dates**



Our 2026 Lambing List is out now! Please pick up a copy. Submit an order on the list and receive a packet of biscuits, and get entered into a prize draw to win a Swampmaster Waterproof Jacket!



FerAppease



Those of you that were at our most recent calf meeting will be familiar with the newest pheromone product available; 'FerAppease'. It is a pour on product containing Maternal Bovine Appeasing Substance (mBAS) applied to the which aims to mimic the naturally produced pheromone that dams secrete whilst their calves are suckling. The idea is that this can help reduce the feeling of stress in the calves at stressful events (e.g. weaning and disbudding) when applied to the nose and the back of the head.

FerAppease is not a licensed veterinary medicine, and though the initial trails and research appear positive, it should be considered with care as some data can be easily overinterpreted, and most studies have been done in the USA on different production systems to our own. However, a recent study from Harper Adams University Farm found that calves which had FerAppease applied daily had an average daily live weight gain post weaning of **0.15kg** higher than those that hadn't had FerAppease, but the overall growth rate was not significantly different between the groups. In the same study it was found that salivary cortisol (the stress hormone) increased after weaning in non-treated calves but remained the same in those that had FerAppease application, indicating less stress in the treated calves post weaning. As a summary, it seems that there may be some anecdotal benefits to using FerAppease, particularly at times of stress for both calves and cows, however the scientific evidence is still in its early stages. Please ask a vet if you have any questions, and we will aim to help the best we can!

Alex Vayro

The use of NSAID's at lambing/calving

Spring is only around the corner but for some of you lambing time has already begun and if it's not lambs there are certainly calves appearing on farms. Most of you will be familiar with the Farm Gate Lambing Supplies List, which includes many essential items for this busy season. The focus for this article will be the NSAID's (non-steroidal anti-inflammatories) aka Metacam and Ketofen, which work like you taking a paracetamol.

These can prove to be invaluable for both the dam and young, helping to reduce pain and inflammation. Whether you've had a difficult birth or simply carrying out routine procedures such as tail docking, NSAID's will help reduce the pain associated with these, leading to increased recovery and productivity. They are also very useful alongside treatment plans for mastitis, prolapses, respiratory infections and lameness by reducing high temperatures, as well as pain and inflammation. Simply put, faster recovery means better milk production and mothering ability (potentially LESS pet lambs?!), as well as young that continue to drink milk without disrupting their DLWG.

Metacam is licensed in cattle but not sheep but can still be used on the cascade. We advise 1ml/20kg for sheep and 1ml/40kg for cattle, both given SC (under the skin) and lasts for approximately 2-3 days. Ketofen is usually used in cattle at a dosage of 1ml/33kg given IM (into the muscle).

Fraser Jackson



Mycoplasma bovis Testing for Cattle



Subsidised testing for a common cause of pneumonia in calves in the UK is open to farmers. Whilst also causing grumbling pneumonia's, Mycoplasma Bovis (M.bovis) can also cause arthritis, swollen joints and mastitis. Due to the nature of M.bovis antibiotics are not very effective, however a new vaccine developed by Zoetis (Protivity) has been shown to prevent lung damage in calves. The scheme will cover the laboratory fees for blood testing 5 calves (over five months old), or a bulk milk sample test. Please get in contact with the practice to discuss further and to utilise this funding whilst it is still available.

zoetis

Beth Griffiths

Quality Colostrum and Choosing the Best Replacement

Giving lambs a feed of good quality colostrum as soon as possible after birth is the most important thing we can do for them. And, while nothing compares to the colostrum from a fit, well-fed ewe, it is useful to brush up on the best practice for what to use when that ewe doesn't have enough, or if it is of poor quality.

Quality of colostrum can be checked with a simple Brix refractometer (approx. £20). While it is more common practice in calves, with the lamb trade staying as strong as it is, perhaps it's something we should be thinking about more for these valuable wee lambs too. If a ewe's colostrum is poor quality, or there is not enough of it, then there are various alternatives:

- **Colostrum from another ewe in the flock**- can be kept in the fridge for up to 7 days or frozen- best to freeze in small quantities that can be easily defrosted in a jug of warm (not boiling!) water- never in the microwave as this will damage the antibodies
- **Cow colostrum**- beware there are a few risks with this such as disease and, although slim, there is a risk of the lamb reacting to bovine colostrum. Colostrum from a cow on your own farm will have antibodies to your farms' bugs and is therefore preferable to getting some from a neighbour.
- **Powdered colostrum**- this is a bit of a minefield. The market is absolutely full of colostrum powders, all with claiming various miracles and actually some are little better than water. Let's remember the key constituents of colostrum are:

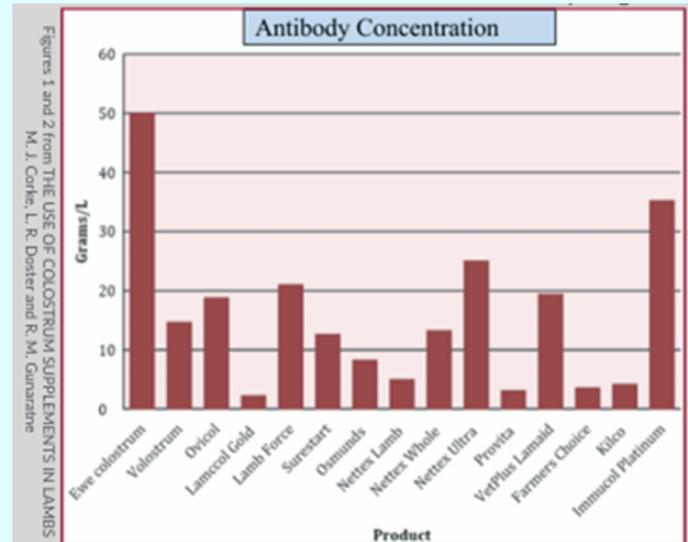
1. Energy (fat)
 2. Antibodies (immunoglobulins or IgG)
 3. Vitamins, minerals and protein (for essential functions)
- Laxative -to encourage clearing out the digestive tract

So, when looking for a colostrum powder, ingredients are listed in order of inclusion, and the first ingredient should always be colostrum – some of the cheaper powders use whey to increase the protein but this is no replacement for antibodies. You also want to make sure that fat content is over 15%, and that it contains vitamins A, D3 and E to support immune system function.

With any powder you should always make it up to the concentration recommended- too weak and the lamb will feel full but not have the level of nutrients it needs, too strong and it can cause them to become dehydrated and scour.

The quantity is also important- 50ml/kg in the first 6 hours followed by 200ml in the first 24 hours is ideal, as both the level of antibodies in the colostrum and the lambs' ability to absorb them rapidly declines after birth, and stops completely at 24 hours, meaning the first feed is vital.

Liusaidh Troughton



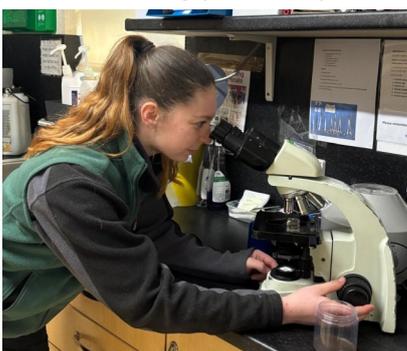
Figures 1 and 2 from THE USE OF COLOSTRUM SUPPLEMENTS IN LAMBS
M. J. Corke, L. R. Dexter and R. M. Gonnarathne



We now stock
Downland Lamb
Force, a brand
almost identical
to Immucol Lamb

Worming Sheep at Lambing

Worming around lambing time has been an ongoing discussion over the years, with advice changing constantly. The most recent thinking you have probably heard is to worm adult ewes that are thin (poor BCS) before turnout with their lambs or those under pressure having had twins/triplets. Weather conditions, the increasing prevalence of wormer resistance, the emergence of worms up here that we didn't previously see (e.g. Haemonchus – that worm that causes pale sheep) and increasing lungworm cases are all factors that cause the goal posts to constantly move for farmers.



There is no one size fits all approach and so a constant discussion with us vets through the year and especially at your yearly health plan/medicine visit is needed. This is the ideal time to discuss issues you have seen (for example, if you have seen Haemonchus in your sheep) to work with your vet to prevent losses the following next year.

Sol Elliott

A warm welcome to our 'newish' vet Fiona Wallbank

Hello! As some of you already know, I'm Fiona and I'm one of the newer additions to Farm Gate Vets. I've been here for 5 months now, and you'll find me based at the Lancaster branch. I'm originally from a dairy farm milking 250 Holsteins in the Ribble Valley, so I've been brought up to believe if in doubt cover it in blue spray, baler twine is your best friend and vets are always wrong. I'm making it my life's work to change my dad's mind on the latter!

At work I like to spend my time scanning cows, occasionally giving sensible advice and making Jim question his sanity. On the weekends you'll see me out walking my cocker spaniel Trevor, playing football, making up excuses to get out of a morning milking and ignoring any plumbing chat with my other half Matt. If I haven't already, I hope to meet you soon and I pray it isn't at 3am!



Good Luck with Calving and Lambing!!

For us and for many of you, our busiest month has arrived. Please be assured we have **3 vets on call** each night and at weekends as standard now across the practice. We are here when you need us!



**Whatsapp Order number
07442 862092**



The 2026 sheep abortion testing scheme is now open, allowing farmers to test unvaccinated

sheep for exposure to toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion (EAE) with lab fees paid for by MSD. The scheme which is open until the end of June 2026, allows farmer to blood test 6-8 unvaccinated sheep that have scanned geld, have aborted or have produced weak lambs. This can be incredibly useful to identify which of these abortion causing bugs are in your flock and can help decision making when it comes to vaccine use. Please ring the practice to book sheep in.

Lambing Product focus -

NoBacZ Navel Spray is unique antibiotic free formula for calves and lambs, proven to clean, protect and dry navels. The product is long lasting with claims to be more effective than iodine, plus the bitter taste deters licking. Can also be used on ear tag sights, tail docking and castration.



Lamb Force Lamb Boost -



Contains a source of energy with a prebiotic and powerful natural antioxidant blend, encouraging a healthy gut environment and lamb survival.



Lamb Force Premium Colostrum

You don't want to mess around when it comes to supplementing colostrum. This Downland product along with Immucol is the top of the vets list.

Diary Dates

Practical Lambing Courses - Saturday 14th March 2026

9.30am—12.30pm at our J36 practice. £48.89 inc. VAT. Please call the office to book.

Our last course of 2026, please don't miss out!!



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

Open 8:30--5pm

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