FriarsMoor
Livestock Health

APRIL NEWSLETTER

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Understanding the Impact of Bovine TB on Cattle Herds

How historic test data can help prevent future infection

Article written by John Walsh, BVSc MRCVS DBR

Bovine tuberculosis (TB) remains one of the most significant disease challenges facing our clients. Its effects extend far beyond the immediate disruption of a breakdown and can influence herd performance, business resilience, and long-term productivity. At Friars Moor Livestock Health, we are working not only to support you during breakdowns but also to help prevent infections in the future. We can carry out TB advisory visits for farms after a TB breakdown.

Bovine TB (bTB) was almost eradicated in the 1970s, largely due to the skin test that was first used by vets in the 1940s and still underpins the government control strategy for bTB today.

The fact that we are still battling to eradicate bTB in 2026 has seen the skin test come under quite a lot of criticism. It is easy to forget that when skin testing first took place, livestock keepers and vets were seeing clinical cases of TB in cattle.

Diagnosis was difficult and animals would typically become chronically unwell, unproductive and lose weight. It is important not to forget how far we have come since the introduction of skin testing.

As a result of surveillance we are unlikely to ever see a case of clinical TB. What we do know is that the skin test is highly specific and as a result, false positives are unlikely. However, this comes at the expense of sensitivity which can lead to large numbers of infected cattle slipping through the net. We also know that more needs to be done in order to identify 'High Risk' cattle which are likely to be a source of residual infection, as well as targeted improvements in biosecurity to prevent reintroduction of disease.

A TBAS visit entails a free visit where we will:

- **Initial Discussion:** Paul Doran our trained TBAS advisor discusses your farm setup, current TB concerns, and any history of breakdowns.
- **Farm Walk-Around:** The advisor and farmer survey the farm to identify risks related to cattle, badgers, slurry, and feed/water sources.
- **Risk Assessment:** The visit focuses on practical biosecurity, such as securing feed stores, elevating water troughs to prevent badger access, and managing livestock, slurry, and herd movements.
- **Action Plan:** At the end of the visit, you and the advisor agree on four tailored, cost-effective recommendations to implement.
- **Follow-Up Visit:** A second, free, follow-up visit occurs 3-6 months later to assess the implementation of the recommendations.

Read more overleaf...

UPCOMING COURSES

- **PRACTICAL AI COURSE** 14–16 APRIL
- **COMMERCIAL FLOCK PARASITE PASTURE MAPPING WORKSHOP** 17 APRIL
- **MASTERING MEDICINES COURSE** 30 APRIL
- **DIY WORM EGG COUNTING A PRACTICAL GUIDE** 6 MAY

fmlh.co.uk/events

OUR RELAUNCHED SMALLHOLDERS CLUB!

Open to any clients who keep small numbers of sheep, goats, cows, pigs, alpacas, chickens or more! Suitable for anyone keeping livestock as pets, right up to small commercial flocks or herds.

Cost £250/year +VAT *T&Cs apply*

PACKAGE ENTITLES YOU TO:

> 45 minutes on farm consultation
> 25% discount on WECs
> 25% discount on meetings
> Designated vet contact
> Vaccine rounds (Heptavac & Bluetongue) visit fee FOC

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As well as offering TBAS visits we have developed our own 'TB dashboard' to Identify At Risk Animals

TB and Johnes disease are caused by very similar bacteria and have similar disease patterns. We have developed a tool to identify at risk animals based on historic skin test results, like the Johnes results you get from your milk recording organisation.

We use the tool to review historic skin test results for every animal in the herd, look for patterns of inconclusive results and those previous readings that were close to threshold. Using this proactive approach we can produce lists of high-risk animals for you.

This may highlight high risk groups or ages that you can then manage to reduce the risk of future breakdowns in your herds.

Our Commitment to Proactive TB Prevention

TB control isn't just about responding to breakdowns—it's about staying ahead of them. At Friars Moor Livestock Health, we are committed to using data, technology, and herd-specific insights to help you protect your livestock and your business.

If you'd like your own TB Dashboard Report or want to discuss what your herd's historic data shows, please contact the practice. Our team is always ready to help you take the next step in TB prevention.

IS YOUR FARM READY FOR FLY SEASON?

Article by Lucy Hepworth, Vet, BVSc MRCVS

Nuisance fly breeding populations will get going through April, so now is a great time to evaluate whether nuisance flies were an issue to your cattle last year, whether you have concerns about chemical fly control and whether you are interested in trying some new ideas in the 'fly control tool box'.

Our youngstock group met at Walmead Farm last month to look at how biological fly control can be used to reduce nuisance fly populations. Farmers had concerns over chemical control 'not lasting' and having negative impacts on useful organisms (e.g. dung beetles, birds), as well as having encouragement from milk contracts to use less topical chemical.

Bestico produce fly traps and parasitic wasps. The traps contain a highly attractive yeast mixture. These can be placed in the collecting yard to reduce number of flies in the parlour. Fly traps are also recommended for the field e.g. next to water troughs. Farms can use native parasitic wasps from April to October every 2 weeks. The wasps arrive as dormant pupae and resemble 'cocoa pops in a bag'!

They hatch out and then lay their eggs in the pupae of the nuisance fly, reducing the nuisance fly population.

A bespoke plan for a farm is put together for a new user; our team of vet techs can help with distributing the wasps. The goal is to reduce the amount of topical chemical used on the cows, with one farm reporting no use on the milking herd having used the wasps for 4 years now. Deltamethrin is the base for most chemical control and resistance is widely reported in South Africa; maybe this is why duration of action seems a common concern.

A handful of farms used a new imported vaccine for New Forest Eye in calves last season, with repeat orders coming in now. Client feedback is very good on how the vaccine has had a significant impact on incidence as well as severity of cases. The vaccine is given as a single dose ahead of turnout.

The conversation broadened to the whole farm ecosystem as we were joined by forestry expertise. Is there sufficient tree shade for cattle, or do they all bunch under the same tree? Does rotational grazing take animals away from the fly breeding grounds within dung pats? If we are planting more trees on farm, what should we consider with respect to species choice and planting schemes to impact flies? Look at the height of the tree canopy. Swallows are natural fly hoovers, a breeding pair eating 3000/day. Mites on dung beetles eat nuisance fly larvae.

So, do take time this April to think about fly control this year before you miss the opportunity. For more information chat to one of the vets and make a bespoke plan for your farm.

We sadly say goodbye to Kate Buckler who is leaving us to concentrate on her ice-cream business. Kate has been a great asset to the lab and improving internal procedures. We would like to thank her for all her hard work & commitment, and we wish her every success for the future. If you do see her at any of the shows, do try her ice-cream as it is delicious. Good luck, Kate.