

# Vet Viewpoint

A regional round-up of key veterinary issues



**Alistair Macpherson**

Shropshire Farm Vets  
Shropshire

\* Recently we had the first two confirmed

diagnoses of Schmallenberg virus (SBV) in cows belonging to two different farmers. They were sick and off their milk.

Cases have recently been confirmed in adjoining counties, but we believe these are the first in Shropshire and, more worryingly, several of our dairy herds are showing increases in late-term abortions and sick fresh cows.

As a result we are now testing for SBV on many of these dairies with results pending. It is most concerning that SBV has been known to cause a milk drop of up to four litres a cow on a herd basis and a 30-50% drop in individual cows. Pregnancy rates in infected herds can also decrease by

as much as 75%. We await the test results with interest and more than a little trepidation.



**Chris Luckhurst**

Calweton Vets  
Cornwall

\* It always pays to get your basics right.

As an example, fine-tuned rations are made worthless by a lack of feeding space. The requirement is 0.7m a cow, and although it is often quoted that this can be reduced by 25%, in reality mass group feeding occurs frequently.

Dead-end passages and dominant cow bullying further reduces available feed space. The cow has an amazing sense of taste and smell, but imagine if you went to a restaurant for a meal and had to drink from a communal coffee cup full of dribble from the previous

drinker and eat with a food-encrusted fork off dirty plates. That's if you are lucky enough to get a seat.

Worse still, food acids often corrode the trough surface so you would have to dodge the broken shards of china. In a dairy herd, feeding is the absolute fundamental for getting everything else right and attention to basics pays back in productivity.



**James Frayne**

Millcroft Veterinary Group  
Cumbria

\* Liver fluke is expected to be a

major problem this winter following the wet summer preceded by a mild winter last year. This has provided ideal conditions for the mud snail, which is the intermediate host of the fluke, to flourish, particularly in the west of the country.

Timing of treatments and choice of drug is critical to control. Triclabendazole is the only drug to effectively kill early immature fluke and is therefore the drug of choice for use in sheep now (in the absence of documented resistance).

The drugs nitroxylnil and closantel are suitable for use in cattle several

weeks post-housing and sheep in late winter as they kill late immature and adult flukes.

Benzimidazole (white drench) wormers, which also have activity against fluke, can be used where a spring dose is required as these kill adult fluke only.



**James McClorey**

Parlands Veterinary Group

Northern Ireland

\* Managing the transition cow is

never simple, and this year, with questionable forage availability and quality, it will be more challenging. The following three steps will give some assistance:

**Acidosis:** Managing the transition from high forage dry cow diet to high concentrate lactating diet is vital and requires careful integration to avoid acidosis.

**Body condition:** Monitor the herd to have a body condition score of 3.0-3.5 at calving. Control during the dry period is simpler if this can be achieved.

**Calcium:** To avoid sub-clinical milk fever, the balance between magnesium, potassium and calcium all need to be considered. Forage has



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the biggest influence on potassium and this needs balancing with a high magnesium/low calcium supplement.

\* For more information, go to [www.xlvets.co.uk](http://www.xlvets.co.uk)

## VET VIEWPOINT

A regional monthly round-up of key veterinary issues from members of the XL Vets group.

# Swine flu incidence higher than thought

By Aly Balsom

Nearly three-quarters of British pig herds are infected with swine flu, according to new findings.

Routine diagnostic blood testing in the UK and Ireland indicated that the incidence of the disease could be higher than expected, with more than 70% of British herds having one or more pigs test positive. This figure increased to more than 90% in Ireland.

Brian Rice, veterinary adviser with Merial Animal Health, said: "Historically, and with no vaccine available, the industry has tended to be reactive to swine influenza, managing outbreaks as they arose, but more and more producers are now realising the benefits of vaccinating against the disease.

"There is a strong economic case for considering preventative treatment. Swine influenza causes fever, apathy, anorexia and respira-

tory signs such as dyspnoea and sneezing, which affect both welfare and productivity.

"In sows it can affect return to oestrus, cause abortion, increase the number of stillborn piglets and decrease lactation."

Previous research carried out in 2008-9 by the Royal Veterinary College and the COSI Consortium across a broader sample of about 17% of the English herd showed that 59% of farms had pigs that were positive for one of the strains of swine influenza.

"Many people may be surprised by just how widespread the disease is, but the real question is how they plan to mitigate the potential risks posed by swine influenza in the productivity of their herds," said Mr Rice.

Producers should talk to their vet and investigate the herd's swine influenza status to implement appropriate preventative measures. [aly.balsom@rbi.co.uk](mailto:aly.balsom@rbi.co.uk)