

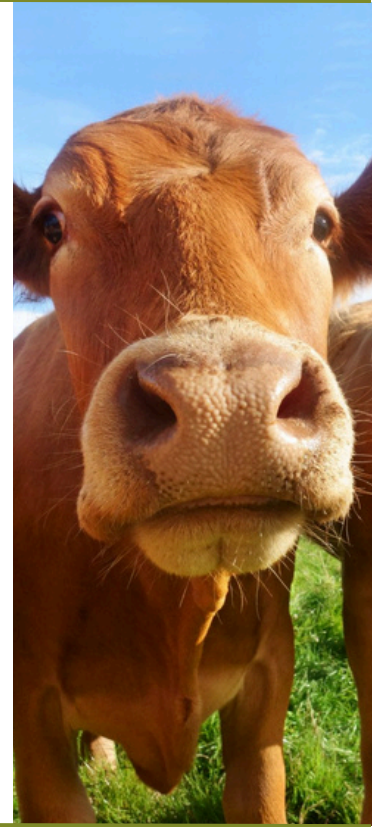
## Happy New Year!

Happy New Year to all our clients and friends! As we shake off the frost and step into January, there is always a sense of possibility in the air. While Christmas “holidays” might look a little different for those of us getting up at 5:00 AM to milk cows or navigating muddy tracks in the dark, the start of the year remains a great time to pause and look ahead.

We often talk about New Year’s resolutions in a personal sense, but the concept is just as valuable for the farm. Instead of broad, unreachable targets, we encourage you to think about marginal gains—the small, consistent improvements that lead to a healthier, more profitable season.

As you look at your goals for 2026, consider these three pillars:

- **Prevention:** Rather than extinguishing fires when animals get sick, can we refine your vaccination protocols or biosecurity measures this year?
- **Data-Driven Decisions:** Whether its tracking somatic cell counts more closely or monitoring daily live-weight gains, let’s make 2026 the year we use your farm data to its full potential.
- **Resilience:** With shifting regulations, focusing on soil health and efficient feed conversion isn’t just good for your farms carbon footprint calculations - it’s vital for the bottom line.



## Pneumonia in calves

The mild, damp weather at the end of last year unfortunately brought with it a major spike in pneumonia. We saw both suckler and dairy calves struggling as the humid conditions provided the perfect environment for pathogens to spread quickly through the sheds.

If the recent warm and wet spell has left your sheds feeling heavy or humid, use this checklist to assess your calf environment:

1. The "Kneel Test" for Bedding
  - Don't just look at the straw—kneel on it. If your knees get damp, the bedding is wicking heat away from the calves and increasing humidity. Dry bedding is your first line of defence against pathogens.
2. Clear the "Dead Air" Zones
  - Pneumonia thrives in stagnant air. Check that cobwebs or stored hay aren't blocking Yorkshire boarding or louvres. You want a steady flow of fresh air above calf level without creating a direct draft.
3. Manage the Moisture
  - Fix leaking troughs and ensure floor gradients are actually directing liquids toward drains. A wet floor contributes significantly to the humidity of the air, that allows bacteria to hang in the air.
4. Stocking Density Check
  - As calves grow, their respiratory output increases. If sheds are at capacity, the air becomes saturated more quickly. If cases are spiking, consider thinning out groups to reduce the pathogen load in the shared airspace.
5. The Smoke Trace
  - If you're unsure about airflow, ask us about a smoke pellet test. It's a simple way to visualize exactly where air is stagnating and where it's moving too fast.

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Early detection is one of the most important factors in determining how a calf will recover from a respiratory challenge. When pneumonia takes hold, the damage to the lung tissue begins almost immediately; the longer a calf remains untreated, the more likely that damage is to become permanent scarring, which leads to a poor doer that never reaches its growth potential. By the time a calf is standing with a dropped head and laboured breathing, the disease is already well advanced.

## Subtle Early Indicators Sign

### What to look for

The Ears	A slight droop or a calf that isn't flicking its ears at flies or noise.
The Nose	Not just heavy discharge, but even a clear, watery runny nose can be a precursor.
The Appetite	Being the last to the trough or drinking with less eagerness than usual.
Respiratory Rate	Watch the flanks while the calf is resting; more than 40 breaths per minute is a red flag.

A digital thermometer is arguably the most cost-effective tool on the farm. If you notice any of the subtle signs mentioned above, the very next step should be taking a rectal temperature. In many cases, a calf will run a fever (a temperature above 39.3 °C) up to 24–48 hours before the first cough or nasal discharge appears.

While environmental management and early detection are vital, they are most effective when built upon a foundation of strong immunity. If your farm has struggled with a pneumonia spike this season, it is worth reviewing your vaccination protocol. Administering vaccines—whether intranasal for rapid local protection or injectable for longer-term immunity—can prime the calf's immune system to fight off specific viral and bacterial triggers before they take hold. Discussing a tailored vaccination plan with us, can help break the cycle of infection and ensure your next crop of calves have the best possible start.

If you are concerned about pneumonia on your farm, or to discuss treatment option, please contact us on **01978 311444**

## Making the Most of Your Scanning Results

Scanning day is a milestone in the sheep calendar. While the immediate focus is often on the scanning percentage, the data you collect is a powerful management tool that goes far beyond identifying which ewes are carrying twins.

If your scanning percentage isn't where you want it to be, let's look at the why.

By reviewing the number of barren ewes versus singles, we can investigate potential culprits:

- Nutrition: Were ewes at the target Body Condition Score (BCS) at tupping?
- Health: Is there an underlying issue with lameness or icebergs like Maedi Visna?
- Ram Performance: Was there a specific group or sub-flock that underperformed?

Infectious diseases such as Toxoplasmosis and Enzootic Abortion play a significant, often hidden role. Toxoplasmosis, caused by a parasite spread through cat faeces, is a major cause of early embryonic loss; if a ewe is infected in the first two months of pregnancy, the foetus is often reabsorbed, leaving the ewe to appear barren at scanning. On the other hand, while Enzootic Abortion typically causes late-term abortion storms, it can also lead to lower scanning percentages through mid-pregnancy losses. Both diseases can circulate in a flock with few outward signs until scanning day reveals a higher-than-expected number of empty ewes or a drop in multiples.

Identifying them through blood testing after scanning is essential to breaking the cycle and implementing a vaccination strategy for the following season.

## Avian Influenza Update

Highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 has been confirmed at a number of sites over the UK. Currently the outbreaks have not been near the Wrexham area, but all bird keepers should remain vigilant and follow stringent biosecurity measures to prevent future outbreaks.

Please remember that it is a legal requirement to register within one month of keeping poultry or other captive birds at any premises in England and Wales. This includes any birds you keep as pets.

For the latest updates please check the APHA website.

