

August 2026 Newsletter

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Penbode Farm Vets

Since 1840

Bluetongue Update

Our vets have been called to **over 100 premises** with suspected bluetongue in the last week in both cattle and sheep in Devon and Cornwall. As a notifiable disease, these have all been reported to APHA and sampled to confirm the diagnosis. There have already been **multiple cases of bluetongue (BTV-3) confirmed in Devon**, including locally.

In sheep, bluetongue can cause death (abortions, stillbirths, foetal deformities, lethargy, inappetence, drooling, breathing difficulties, lameness, and Swollen head)

Being a viral infection, we're limited to palliative treatments such as anti-inflammatories and possibly antibiotics for secondary bacterial infections.

In cattle the symptoms are relatively mild other than in breeding cattle where it can cause abortion, stillbirths or foetal deformities. So, although we may not be seeing ill cattle right now there will inevitably be some fertility issues in unvaccinated cows over the coming months.

The midges that spread bluetongue are likely to be **active until January now dependent on the weather**.

Syvazul BTV 3 vaccine is available in a 40 dose bottle and a 100 dose bottle. It cost's £2.50 +VAT a dose and can be used in animals over 3 months of age. Sheep require a single SC dose, Cattle are two IM doses three weeks apart.

Last year there were 12 cases of a different strain of bluetongue (BTV-8). The vaccines are strain specific and so there is no cross immunity. That being said there were over 300 cases of BTV-3 detected last season and the 24 confirmed cases in the UK this season have all been BTV-3.

Bluetongue Advice Hub

Our vets Andy, Jemma and Matilda will be at market on Wednesday for a drop in advice hub. Please do pop by and see them if you would like to chat to them about Bluetongue (or anything else)

Wednesday 5th August
9:30am - 12:30pm
Penbode Kiosk @ Holsworthy Market



FAMACHA Card Training now available online

identify Barbers Pole Worm (*Haemonchus contortus*) infection on your farm

By Sarah Phillpot

**Veterinary Surgeon
BVSc MRCVS**

With the warmer weather, we have been seeing an increasing number of cases of Barbers Pole worm infection in sheep, with farmers reporting lethargic or dead adult ewes. Adult *Haemonchus contortus* worms live and feed on blood in the abomasum of sheep and goats, with 5000 adult worms capable of consuming 250ml of blood a day!

A short 2 hour, time-flexible online course for farmers on “all things Barber’s Pole worm” is now being offered by the University of Edinburgh.

It features short training videos which discuss:

- The issues surrounding infection (how sheep become infected, what clinical signs to look out for)
- How to investigate if your farm is infected using the FAMACHA card system
- How to control infections through sustainable control strategies and targeted treatments

The course can be accessed anytime over a 60 day period, and once completed, you’ll receive a certificate and the official FAMACHA card to use on farm (only available to trained individuals).

The FAMACHA card system has been used successfully in other parts of the world for many years now, with animals identified as being infected with *Haemonchus* based on their eye colour (anaemia level). This simple system allows for individual treating of animals, thus reducing the use of drenches and slowing the development of worm resistance.

The course is available here:

<https://www.shortcourses.ed.ac.uk/course/famacha#what-you'll-learn>



If you are concerned you may have Barbers Pole worm in your flock, please give your local Penbode Sheep Team member a call, who will be more than happy to discuss sustainable parasite control strategies with you.



SUCH A TEASER

By Victoria Pyne Mercier

Veterinary Surgeon
BSc, BVetMed MRCVS

I'm sure you've heard the term "teaser ram" before, but besides working 2 weeks out of the year, what do they do? To understand this we need to know a little bit more about ewe fertility. Ewes are short-day seasonally polyestrous breeders. This means that they will only be able to breed during certain times of the year, typically late summer to early winter. To keep lambing seasons tight, we can utilize something called the "ram effect" where we isolate ewes at least 1 mile from the ram for several weeks pre-breeding. When the ram is reintroduced it will cause the ewes to ovulate at a similar time and therefore lamb at a similar time next spring. This can also help encourage maiden ewes to begin cycling naturally.

To create a teaser ram, we perform a surgical procedure called a vasectomy, which involves removing a structure called the vas deferens under light sedation. This will leave the teaser non-fertile, but retaining the same hormones and behaviours that can trick the ewes into ovulating early as a cohort. Teasers should run with breeding ewes for at least 14 days and be replaced with fertile rams on day 17. Because we have encouraged ovulation with the teaser, the fertile rams should catch the ewe's first heat making her more likely to conceive in her first cycle. It should be noted that the ratio of teasers is 1 to less than 100 ewes, but an additional number of fertile rams will be needed for service, 1:20-25 ewes.



I know what you're thinking, "How do I get a teaser?" Luckily we perform vasectomies in our practice lambing bay, but not every ram will be suited to the job. Ideal candidates are usually healthy shearlings, as we want them to last for several seasons. We look for males with a high libido, sound feet and joints, good teeth, and be an overall healthy and manageable animal. If you are a disease accredited flock, it is important that your teasers match your health status. Vasectomies should be carried out 6-8 weeks before teasers are placed with the ewes. We then keep the removed vas deferens for 7 years and highly recommend these are sent for tissue testing before teasers are placed with the ewes, after which the animal can be sold as a proven teaser. We also recommend that a teaser has a yearly MOT including EEJ (electroejaculation) to ensure he is fit and well, and to ensure the vas deferens has not recanalized, causing him to become fertile again. This can occur but is rare.

If you are interested in having a teaser for this year or next, please contact the practice and we can answer any questions you may have!

MEET FARM VET OLI

By Oliver Charlton
Veterinary Surgeon
BVSc MRCVS



Meet the Farm Vet: Oli

This month, we're highlighting Oli, one of our farm vets. His passion for cattle health and welfare shows in everything he does.

A Favourite Day on Farm

When asked about his favourite farm visit, Oli quickly says it's a good calving. He finds it most rewarding to help with a difficult calving and make sure both cow and calf are safe. For him, the teamwork, problem-solving, and positive results make calving especially satisfying.

Surgical Successes

Oli especially enjoys doing LDA (Left Displaced Abomasum) surgeries. He likes that these operations are usually straightforward and help cows recover quickly.

He also finds caesarean sections very rewarding. They are often urgent and intense, but being able to help both cow and calf makes the work especially meaningful for him.





A Special Interest in Bull Fertility

A big part of Oli's job is bull fertility testing, which he's become very interested in. Finding subfertile bulls can save farmers time, money, and stress during the breeding season. Oli likes knowing his work helps farmers make good decisions and avoid big losses later on.

Looking Ahead

Outside of work, Oli has a few goals for the year. He wants to finish some DIY projects and spend more time restoring his Reliant Scimitar. The classic car has been a long-term project, and while there's still work left, he's getting closer to finishing it.

Whether he's helping with a tough calving, doing surgery, or checking bulls for breeding, Oli's commitment to farmers and their animals makes him a valued part of our team.

