

September 2025 Newsletter

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Penbode Farm Vets
Since 1840

Join the beef club and save!

By Lesley Bingham

Clinical Director, Veterinary Surgeon

BVM&S MRCVS



Our Prime beef club is lead by Clinical Director Lesley Bingham and supported by other vets in Penbode who have an interest in beef herds. They are Clodagh and Tom at Stratton, and Lizzie, Oli, Lewis, Matilda and Victoria at Holsworthy, but this doesn't stop all of the other vets getting involved as well. Being part of Vet Partners means that we also have access to a huge group of vets across the country with a focus on all types of beef enterprises.

The benefits of the Prime Beef Club are listed opposite as a reminder of why this is such a good deal, whether you are already signed up or still thinking about it. We understand that every farm is different, but there are elements that all farms will benefit from, making the Penbode Prime Beef club suitable for sucklers, rearing or finishing units. Included in the monthly fee is a host of benefits focusing on preventative health care and the relationship between vet and farmer. The value of the benefits is over £500 each year, but would be even more if you use us more frequently. This easily works out at a saving of over £200 each year. Included benefits are four visits a year, allowing for regular vet contact for pre-planned work such as PDs, calf health visits or pre-movement testing. We will also offer you a 10% discount on our hourly rate for pre-booked work, such as fertility or pre-movement test work and bull fertility tests.

All red tractor assurance paperwork will be completed, allowing you to spend as long as needed with your vet to discuss the health and performance of your stock. Added to the basic red tractor health plan is a full infectious disease control plan and annual antibiotic report, plus any farm-specific plans and protocols you require. We feel that spending time on health planning, you will see improvements to health and performance, removing the worry of how much the advice is costing you.

We know that pneumonia vaccines are essential in the control of disease on certain units, so to help make it as easy as possible, we will offer a tech to administer them, providing you do the whole group at the same time.

You will also receive group newsletters and invites to meetings, allowing you to connect, share, and discuss with like-minded farmers.

If you would like to discuss joining the Penbode Prime Beef club phone the practice and ask to speak to a member of "team beef".

Penbode Beef Club

Annual Membership Benefits

Four pre-planned visits per year

Named vet for routine work

Annual Red Tractor compliant herd health plan

Annual performance and health review

Annual antibiotic report

Annual infectious disease control plan

Free respiratory vaccine administration

Four faecal worm egg counts

Discounted bull fertility testing

Seasonal beef specific newsletter

Personal invitation to group meetings throughout the year

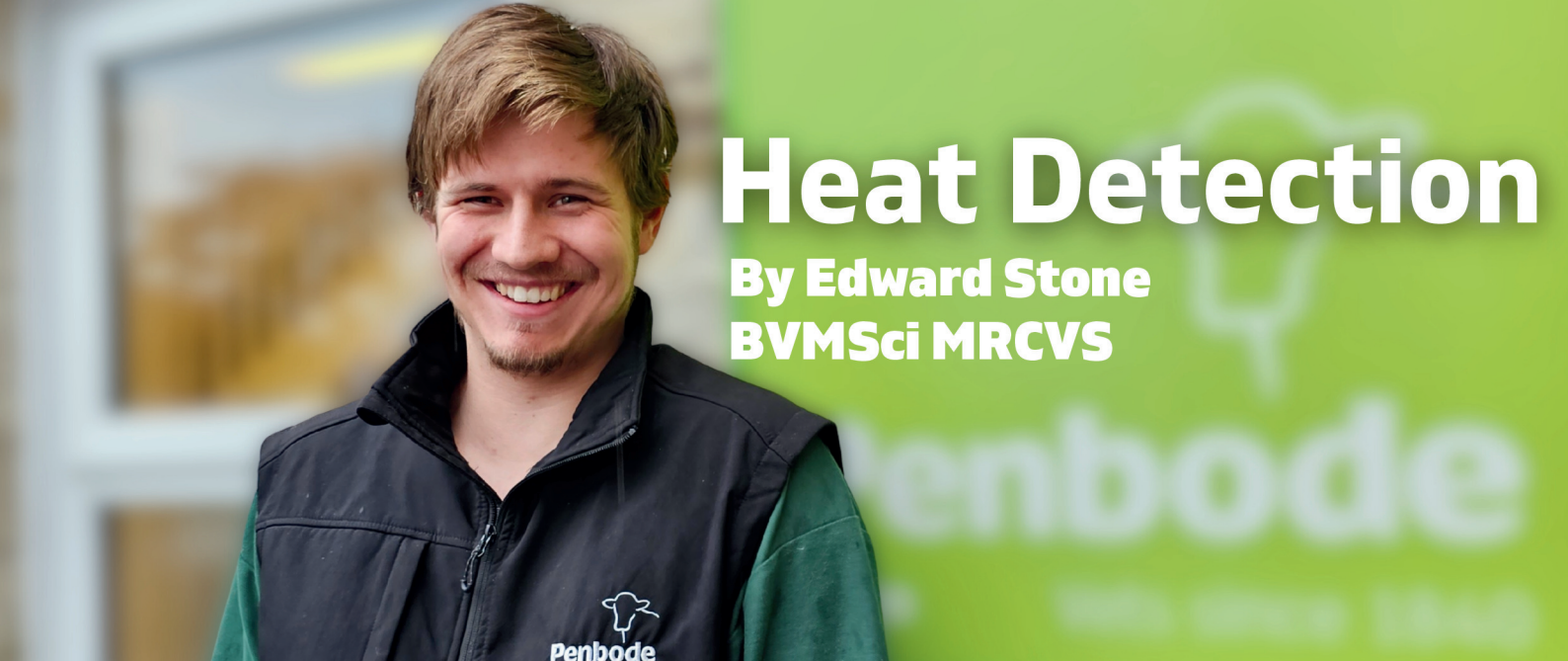
Reduced hourly rate for prearranged work

Penbode
Prime Beef
Club



For just £25

Ex Vat p/m



Heat Detection

By Edward Stone
BVMSci MRCVS

A key part of a successful and profitable dairy herd is heat detection; it is one of the major contributing factors towards a short calving interval. A missed heat can lead to a delay in insemination of up to 21 days, which in turn leads to extra days in milk and extra cost in veterinary interventions to bring this down.

There are several options to help identify when a cow is in oestrus (bulling) ranging from your rub markers, such as tail paint and scratch pads, up to activity collars etc. that rely on computer analysis to identify when an individual cow is in oestrus.

Observation:

Good stockmanship, knowledge of your own cows, and a lot of time is key when observing to identify cows in oestrus. Solely using observation can be done very well, but requires the cows to be observed closely, and at multiple times a day, away from milking and feeding to minimise the possibility of missing oestrus behaviour. Generally, it is best used alongside other means to increase the percentage of heats detected.

Rub markers:

These are simple methods used to help identify when a cow is in oestrus by giving a visual indication as to when she has been standing to be mounted. They are generally cheap, but require more experience to be used effectively as there is a subjective element to identifying when the Paint has been rubbed off due to mounting, compared to just being rubbed off. The tail paint needs to be reapplied regularly and the scratch pads can easily be lost/knocked off in cubicles.

Activity monitors:

An activity monitor is worn permanently by the cow and it detects the increase in movement and activity that corresponds with oestrus behaviour. These can vary from a pedometer, that just picks up a spike in the amount of moving a cow does; up to sophisticated collars and computer systems that look at activity, rumination and other factors to pick out cows that are in oestrus. These systems are a lot less labour intensive, but more expensive to put in place and use, they also require some staff training in how to effectively use the system and the systems can take some adjusting to ensure the sensitivity is right for your farm.

Milk Progesterone:

This is a way to identify oestrus without having to see those behavioural changes, so can be helpful for those cows with silent heats. However it can be expensive as you require multiple tests to confirm low milk progesterone, it also requires highly organised records and well trained staff to be used effectively.

Synchronisation protocols:

One way to get around heat detection entirely is to use a synchronisation protocol and use a fixed time AI. This eliminates the need to see an observed heat to be able to serve, you can manipulate the cow's hormones so she ovulates around your service. This is useful for individual cows, or under specific circumstances, however would be an expensive course of action for every cow, and you get a lower conception rate to synchronised cows than you do serving to a natural oestrus.

Bull:

A bull is very adept at identifying cows in oestrus, and can be utilised to both identify and serve. However you can't pick your bull specifically for the cow or use sexed semen, a teaser bull can identify cows in oestrus and can mark with a chin ball or be seen mounting cows. However, any bull is another animal to keep on the farm, and bulls are larger to handle and more dangerous to have in with the cows.

In conclusion, there are many options for heat detection, each with advantages and disadvantages, and they can be used in combination with each other. There is no one size fits all answer to getting heat detection optimised on your farm. Have a chat with your vet if you feel your heat detection could be improved or you would like more information about any of these methods.

Farm Vet Taster Day

By Jay Waylen
BSc Hons



In August, we hosted our Farm Vet Taster Day, which was free of charge and open to all.

We struggle to facilitate work experience placements for those who have an interest in becoming a Farm Vet, so we decided to start hosting taster days for those aged 15 - 18. The event was well supported, we even had someone who travelled from Lincolnshire! We started off the day with short presentations on a day in the life of a farm vet, getting into vet school and life as a vet student.

We then had a morning full of practicals, including drying off a cow (using a model udder), sheep examinations, a lambing workshop, lab work and a tour of a farm vets van. After lunch we headed out on the farm. A huge thank you to Sarah & David of Newlands Farm for allowing us to visit. Sarah gave us a fantastic tour of their farm and system. We then had time in the calf pen, where the students were given the opportunity to weigh some calves using a weigh tape, practice putting halters on and using a stethoscope. We finished the day with a routine, where we body condition scored the cows and Tom scanned some cows and talked us through what he could see, the students were able to see on screens.

We thoroughly enjoyed today and we hope those who attended did too! Hopefully it's inspired a few of you to become farm vets and we look forward to hearing about what you all get up to in the future.



Bird flu update

You may have heard that Avian Influenza, more commonly known as 'bird flu', has been found recently in Devon. Our vets at Penbode have already been drafted in to help with surveillance work on the ground. But what is bird flu, how can you spot it and what does it mean for any owners of poultry in the area?

Avian influenza is caused by a virus that spreads most commonly via direct contact between birds. Wild birds are a concern in the spread of this disease. It can infect all bird species, but causes most severe signs in turkeys and chickens where it is often fatal. In other species such as ducks and geese signs aren't often as severe.

Signs you may see in infected birds include:

- Sneezing and difficulty breathing
- Swollen head
- Dark discoloured wattle and/or comb
- Diarrhoea
- Neurological issues such as drunken/staggering movements and twisting of the neck
- Excessive watering of eyes
- Reduction in egg production
- Death

Bird Flu is a notifiable disease in poultry and captive birds, meaning that any suspected cases must be reported to APHA even if the signs are mild.

Avian influenza has been found at a commercial poultry farm near Lifton on 8th August. A 3km protection zone and 10km surveillance zone has been declared around the premises. Any birds within the protection zone are required to be housed or kept isolated where they can't have any contact with other poultry, captive birds or wild birds. To reduce the risk of spread, move any wild bird feeders away from your poultry house. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to get in touch with the team.

(All details correct as of 20/08/25)

Upcoming Course

Monday 15th Sept – Beef and Sheep Farm Walk & Talk

We will be joined by Paul Uglow from Norbrook to discuss the management of stomach worms and fluke in beef and sheep. Pasty lunch provided. Kingsford Farm, EX22 7BX by kind permission of Bob & Liz Priest. 11am – 2pm. Free for Prime Beef Club and Flock Health club members or £5pp.

Thursday 25th Sept – Dairy Farm Walk & Talk

Join us at Swingdon Farm by Kind Permission of The Hale Family. We will be discussing the changes that the team at Swingdon have made to improve calf health and growth. Vet Tech Meg Brooking will be discussing our calf tracker programme and we will be joined by Tim Potter from Zoetis who will be discussing their new vaccine Protivity, which is effective in protecting healthy calves against respiratory disease caused by Mycoplasma bovis. 11am – 2pm, Swingdon Farm, EX22 7EH. Ploughmans lunch provided. Free for Dairy Club members or £5pp.

Tuesday 30th September, Wednesday 1st and Friday 3rd October – DEFRA approved cattle AI course.

A mix of practical and theory. £495pp ex VAT. 10am – 3pm. Day one based at Holsworthy Market. Day 2 & 3 on farm.

Monday 20th October – Mastering Meds Course

2pm – 3:30pm – held at our kiosk at Holsworthy Market, £30pp ex VAT.

If you would like to attend any of the above, please contact your local branch to book your space or email jay.waylen@penbodevets.co.uk



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