



Spring 2008 Newsletter

Understanding The Threat

With the change in climate farmers and vets are being urged to protect their stock from the threat of bluetongue and prepare for the arrival of a vaccine.

In Belgium 2006 they suffered just 60 cases of bluetongue that escalated to 2,500 infected farms in 2007. It is deemed likely that the same pattern will wreak havoc in the UK's livestock industry if the vaccine is not used quickly and wisely.

Advice has been taken from Jan Grinderachter, a Suffolk sheep farmer from Belgium whose own sheep contracted the virus in August 2007. "The vaccine should first be made available to livestock on the borders of the infected zones." Jan explained: "Bluetongue is a virus disease, but it needs hosts and vectors – transmitters, the midge is the transmitter. We have a lot to learn, but we can tell you there are 24 types of bluetongue serotypes, we and the East of the UK have BTV8, which has never been seen in Europe before, not even in North Africa."

"The midges are most active one hour before sunrise and one hour before sunset- and on a dull day they could well be active throughout. It is only the females which bite with activity influenced by temperature."

Warning signs in animals are not always apparent. Symptoms include excessive saliva – forming a white beard, blood in the mucus in the nose, inflammation of the mouth, a lot of visible white eye showing, lameness and stiffness, depression and doziness. Loss of appetite, reproductive disorders are also symptomatic. Research has shown that midges operate in enclosed areas, such as farm sheds as well as outside.

It is advisable to contact your local vet and start making enquiries about the vaccine, which will be in demand once available.



It's a Porker

The Pork Industry will die if prices don't improve, MPs told.

Thousands of pig producers from the UK joined forces in March to protest in London about the low returns they are receiving and draw MP's attention to the real danger of losing British Pork forever if prices do not increase. The National Pig Association handed in a signed petition of 13,000 names calling for support.

Feed prices have doubled in recent months and pig farmers face an average loss of £26 on every pig they produce. MP's were called to recognise the precarious situation which Britain's producers are facing through no fault of their own. "The government needs to understand that the UK cannot have it both ways: producing highest quality pork domestically and then undercutting it with imports produced to lower animal welfare and food safety standards" confirmed NPA.

The solution to the problem is simple; retailers should increase the price paid to farmers and consumers can play their part too by checking the label and making sure they buy British Pork. The latest YouGov survey suggests that 78% of people who buy pork products are prepared to pay a little more to cover rising production costs and support British Farmers.



Badgers v TB

In a new independent report – Estimates for local and movement- based transmission of Bovine Tuberculosis in British Cattle, published in the proceedings of the Royal Society – concluded that up to 75% of TB outbreaks in cattle are caused by contact with infected badgers and other so called “local effects” in high risk areas, rather than by movement of cattle.

This conclusion contradicts repeated claims by the Badger Trust that cattle movements are responsible for most TB outbreaks in the UK. Farmers are increasingly desperate for action to be taken to protect them against ever increasing TB. The message from farmers at the recent TB conference is simple – infected badgers are responsible for the vast majority of TB outbreaks and only by targeting infected badgers will you ever get on top of the disease.

Milk Shortage

Cow numbers fall as farmers exit the Industry

Europe will need a big increase in dairy cow numbers to maintain dairy production and take advantage of the 2% increase in quotas from April, according to a report from the European Commission.

The report advises that cow numbers fell as farmers exited the industry during a period of low prices and losses. Rising demand for milk products on its home and export markets mean that farmers are unable to respond fully to the increased demand. The report suggests that France alone needs to increase cow numbers by at least 750,000. France and the UK were the member states most below milk quota last year, mainly due to the number of farmers who had now left the industry.

Insurance Health Check

With harvesting season just around the corner, this time of year is a good time to give your insurance cover a quick check. Stored grain could be worryingly underinsured with the increase in grain value, and with cow prices on the increase, so could the livestock section.

Similarly, depreciation could have eaten into the value of some of your machinery since the last valuations resulting in being over insured on some items.

It is worthwhile spending an hour or so checking through your insurance policy and making sure everything is up to date. If you require assistance or would like BKG West to carry out a review, please contact us on the number below.

Child Safety on Farms

Agriculture has one of the highest fatal accident rates of all industries in the UK. As farms are homes as well as workplaces children are often present and every year they are seriously hurt and even killed.

45 children and young people have died and more than 400 have been seriously injured on farms in the last ten years. With this increasing trend it is advisable to follow simple guidelines to help prevent accidents occurring on the farm. Potential dangers include moving vehicles, water, slurry pits, hay stacks, animals and machinery. More information can be gained from the HSE Website: www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture.



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