



alnorthumbria
farm vets

Newsletter

May 2026

We hope for those that have been lambing and calving that it has been a successful season. As many now look forward to turnout, it is a good time to book in your BVD Check Test. For this we need to blood sample 5 or 6 animals per youngstock group, homebred, aged 9-18 months, and many of our farms will be eligible for the Annual Health and Welfare Review funding to help with this. Keep an eye on the SCOPS forecast for Nematodirus and collect faecal samples from lambs to check parasite status.

Calf Survival Around Calving: A Major Opportunity to Improve Weaning Numbers

By Anna Bruguera Sala

The 90+ Club is a benchmarking and discussion group established by Alnorthumbria Farm Vets over three years ago.

The group's purpose is to monitor spring block-calving suckler herds, identify where calf losses occur, and work together to improve calf survival and overall herd performance.

Reviewing the data collected over the last three years, a clear pattern has emerged. Across the group, the proportion of calves lost at each stage of production has remained broadly similar year on year, although individual farms may experience significant variation between seasons. This consistency suggests that many of the challenges affecting suckler herd performance are predictable and, with appropriate interventions, potentially preventable.

The largest loss of potential weaned calves occurs at the breeding stage. On average, as a group, around **9% of cows put to the bull fail to get in calf**. While this represents a loss of production, it does not always result in a direct financial loss. In the current market, farms may still be able to sell empty cows at a profit.

From our findings, the most significant losses occur around calving, known as the peri-natal period. The data highlights the importance of birth and the first week of life: we lose almost as many calves at calving itself, through stillbirths (calves born dead) at **2.3%**, as we do during the much longer six- to nine-month period between birth and weaning (**2.7%**). Moreover, more than half of those post-birth losses occur within the first seven days of life (**1.3%**), underlining just how vulnerable calves are at this early stage.

The importance of the peri-natal period (the time before, during and immediately after calving), has long been recognised, and the figures gathered by the group support this. A calf that is born alive and survives its first week has a very high chance of reaching weaning. Improving calving management and early-life care are therefore the most effective ways to increase overall herd performance.

Accurate recording is essential to achieving these improvements. Although reviewing losses can be difficult during an already demanding calving period, understanding where and why losses occur is the only way to prevent the same issues recurring year after year.

Peri-natal deaths can result from a range of causes, including calving difficulty, infection, nutritional imbalances and genetics. Where stillbirths or early life losses exceed 2%, a discussion with your vet, supported by postmortem examinations and laboratory testing, can help identify underlying issues and guide practical management changes. Small improvements at the right stage can make a significant difference to the number of calves weaned each autumn.



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The UK Lambing Survey 2026

The UK Lambing Survey 2026 is an industry-wide project collecting information from sheep farmers across the country to better understand what's happening during lambing this season.

Led by the University of Nottingham and supported by organisations across the sheep sector, the survey looks at key challenges such as disease pressures, vaccine availability, weather impacts and flock performance.

The results will help build a national picture of lambing practices and pressures, and will directly inform future guidance on flock health, welfare and responsible medicine use.

The survey is anonymous and takes around 10-12 minutes to complete. By taking part you can help to shape future policies as well as industry support for the UK sheep sector.



Subsidised Blood Testing for Barren Ewes and Abortions

It's not too late to take advantage of MSD's subsidised testing for barren or aborted ewes this season.

The scheme runs until 30th June and involves blood sampling unvaccinated ewes to test for antibodies for toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion, which can be done several weeks after abortion or following lambing when barren ewes have been identified.

The scheme runs until 30th June so there is plenty of time to take up the offer.

If you have experienced more than 2% of the flock aborting we would strongly recommend investigating the cause.



Pelvic Measuring

At this time of year we are starting to look at which heifers to put to bull for next year's calving season. There are many factors to consider such as demeanour, age, conformation, udders, soundness etc.

A further factor to consider is chances of them having calving difficulties. Some of this can be assumed from the calving ease of that heifer's dam and the bull's 'Estimated Breeding Value of Calving Ease Daughters'. As well as having these statistics, knowing the actual size of the heifer's pelvis is an important factor to consider when selecting heifers as a big heifer may not necessarily mean that she has a big pelvis.

Pelvic measuring is done rectally using a Rice Pelvimeter to measure the width and height of the pelvis at the narrowest points. These measures are then multiplied to calculate pelvic area and compared to a chart to determine if the heifer has a large enough pelvis for that age and breed. While measuring the pelvis the vet can also manually palpate and check the uterus and ovaries to rule out freemartins and non-breeders.

Pelvic size is thought to be a heritable trait therefore heifers with adequate pelvic size that are selected for breeding should pass this trait onto their offspring.

By having this additional step in your selection of replacement heifers you will be reducing the risk of calving difficulties due to heifers being too small.

Please contact your local branch to book.



Don't Forget to Use!

- **Clostridial and Pneumonia vaccinations** - Ovivac P/ Heptavac P in lambs, for both Pasturella pneumonia and clostridial disease.
- **Fly prevention** - Clik Extra, Clikzin, Crovect, Dysect sheep pour-ons for blowfly etc. and Swish or Deltanil/Dectospot to prevent fly problems in cattle.
- **Boluses and injections** to prevent trace element deficiencies.
- **Baycox** - For treatment of coccidiosis.