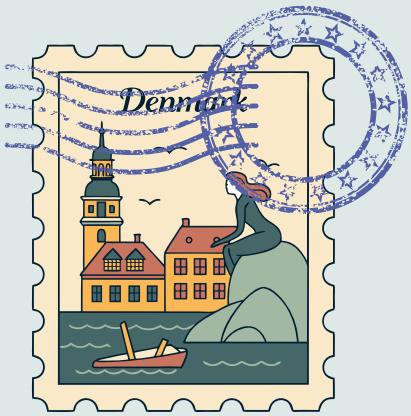
BISHOPTON VETERINARY GROUP

Winter Newsletter 2026



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- Maedi Visna – A UK Update
- Knockdown Castration & Disbudding



In September, nine of the team visited Aarhus in Denmark. *Miles Middleton* considers what we learned.

Dairy Trip

In September nine of our vets visited Aarhus in Denmark. We were hosted by a 14 vet cattle practice based thirty minutes outside the city.
We started our tour with a visit to the Arla head office in Aarhus to meet with Katrine Lawaetz, Chief Veterinary lead for Arlagaarden. This offered us an interesting insight into some of the history and cultural drivers behind many of the standards set out by Arla for their members.

Later we visited the head office of Dyrlaeger & Ko, an organisation very similar to XLVets owned by a group of independent practices from across Denmark. Here we learned about how the veterinary industry is structured within Denmark, the regulations they are governed by and the key challenges they face in a country with much tighter regulation around drug use and far greater state involvement in day-to-day animal health.

We visited several farms in the area ranging from high output, robot milking confinement systems giving nearly 14000L ECM/ year, through to organic 'grazing' systems which never the less were still producing around 10000L ECM. Jurgen, one of the vets hosting us kindly accompanied us around the different farms and explained some of the challenges the different herds faced.

The national average daily yield per cow in Denmark stands at over 12000L ECM, making this the highest national average yield per cow in Europe, a title previously held by the Dutch. Denmark is best known for its pig industry and the majority of the agricultural land in the country is plough-able arable-quality land. The average holding size in the country is around 80Ha and the average herd size is slightly under 250 cows. Many dairy farms import a significant amount of forage from neighbouring farms. Danish dairy farms felt highly capitalised and there seemed to be some significant parallels with the Dutch dairy sector.



Written by Miles Middleton,BVSc NSch MRCVS

Dairy Trip

Denmark has successfully eradicated Johnes, BVD and IBR from the national herd following state-led eradication schemes. There is currently an ongoing program to eradicate salmonella. These initiatives are co-ordinated by the state veterinary service but receive strong support from farmers, who appear to adhere to a strong, mutually co-operative culture.

Traditionally maize has formed the basis of the forage base on Danish dairy farms. Annual average rainfall in Aarhus lies at just over 700mm (similar to York and Hull) and despite being at a similar latitude to Newcastle are able to consistently grow maize crops of around 15 Tonnes per acre.

Like the Dutch dairy sector 5-10 years ago, the Danes are starting to be subjected to nutrient quotas. In order to manage these new regulations many farmers are converting land to grassland resulting in increasing amounts of grass silage in rations. More than one of the farms we visited were experiencing some of the difficulties that here in England we are familiar with around the variability of grass silages in high yielding cows, especially in transition cows. Dutch farmers had similar challenges when these regulations were introduced in the Netherlands.

Managing a grazing system in a lower rainfall area is clearly quite challenging. The organic herd that we visited still supplied 75% of the cows diet through a maize based TMR. The herd had only utilised around 3-4 T/Ha of dry matter from grazing over the season. It highlighted to us, as a group, that a key advantage parts of the UK hold is having a climate that facilitates very good grass growth from natural rainfall, relative to other parts of the world. However, as we discussed at Arla, this utilisation of milk from grass in the UK, gives the UK a much more seasonal milk profile compared to all other countries in Arla. This presents significant challenges at a processing level.

Seeing dairy farming in other countries always provides the opportunity to observe things we are familiar with but with slightly differing external forces and cultural drivers applied. It provides the chance to reflect upon the challenges and opportunities we face here in North Yorkshire.

Miles





Maedi Visna – A UK update

Maedi Visna (MV) is on the rise, unfortunately it has become a common topic of conversation with our sheep farmers. It is estimated that over 10% of UK flocks have the disease, but in reality, this number is likely to be far higher. Luke Johnson explores:



Written by Luke Johnson
BVM BVS MRCVS

As an "iceberg" disease, Maedi Visna is often able to spread unnoticed, partly because MV causes so many different signs it can often be disguised and go under the radar. MV can cause the following:

- Wasting
- "Pneumonia"
- Hard bag
- Increased susceptibility to other diseases.
- MV is always fatal eventually.

Even if you don't see any of the signs above MV can still be present in your flock. Less obvious effects of MV can also cost your business:

- **Reduced lamb performance.** A study following MV affected ewes showed a reduced milk yield of 6-7%. Any lamb born to these ewes weighed 0.94kg less at weaning. On average infected ewes produce 3 crops of lambs in a lifetime vs 5 crops for normal ewes on the same farm.
- **Increased cull rates and decreased cull value** - forced culling rates due to hard bags and pneumonia signs increase the number of culls by 20%. With increasing replacement prices this is also costly.
- **Increased ewe mortality** - the direct cost of losing a ewe, this often occurs when ewes are in lamb or rearing lambs due to the increased stress in those periods.



It is difficult to put a number on the cost due to the variability between individual flocks.

Fortunately, there is an affordable and straightforward blood test available to determine if the disease is present in your flock.

The most effective way to check for MV in your flock is to test around 10-12 older, thinner ewes, as they are the group most likely to be affected. If these ewes test negative, you can reasonably expect the rest of the flock to be clear as well.

There are several strategies for dealing with MV, and what works best for one farm may differ from another:

Eradication – Test and Cull
This approach requires more initial effort and cost but can lead to successful eradication after 3-5 whole flock tests and the removal of positive cases.

Test and Manage – Separate "Clean" and "Dirty" Flocks
This method helps slow the transmission rate in the clean flock.

Management without Testing
Focus on breeding from younger ewes, as they are less likely to shed the disease and pass it on to their offspring.

Current research indicates a strong genetic link to how significantly MV affects individual sheep. Initial findings suggest that this protective gene is prevalent in certain breeds but absent in others. While the complete study has yet to be released, and a commercial test for the gene is not currently available, breeding for resistance to MV may become a viable option in the future.

In the meantime, the choices to control MV in a positive flock are either to attempt eradication or to accept its presence and manage it effectively to minimise its impact. No matter the choice, the first step is to determine if MV is lurking in your flock!

Knockdown castration and disbudding.

A Focus on Stress Reduction

By Katharine Shepherd

Disbudding and castration are crucial routine management practices for young calves. While these procedures can be painful and stressful, we strive to minimise discomfort through the use of local anaesthetics and pain relief. This article highlights our 'knockdown' service, designed to perform these tasks with minimal stress for both the animals and the staff involved.

'Knockdown' involves sedating the calf before the procedure, making handling easier compared to traditional methods. Calves still receive local anaesthesia and pain relief during the process.

Benefits of the 'Knockdown' Service:

- Calves only need to be physically restrained for a brief period for sedation administration.
- There is no need for a crush or other handling facilities.
- The procedure is significantly quicker.
- Enhanced cleanliness, as the animal remains still, making it easier to maintain a clean surgical area.
- Reduced stress for the operator.
- Decreased stress for the calves.

In some countries sedation is mandatory for these procedures. Research from the United States has found benefits to sedation including lower levels of stress hormones (cortisol) and faster resumption of play behaviours compared to non-sedated calves. Although a 2024 UK study highlighted a reduction in growth rates in the first 3 weeks after sedation compared with calves disbudded standing, over the six-week period after disbudding there was no difference in growth rates or health events between the groups. There will unsurprisingly be a short-term reduction in feed intake after sedation and so it is important to time the procedure such that calves have ample opportunity to wake up prior to their next feed to minimise the risk of reduced milk intake and subsequent growth rate impact.

Tips to make it run smoothly:

- Do not have calves which do not require the procedure in the same pen as calves which are to be sedated. i.e. polled heifers
- Disbud calves age 4-6 weeks of age.
- Ensure calves are monitored for 2-3 hours post procedure. Calves will be placed in a sternal position to enable release of abdominal gases and prevent bloating following sedation. Calves are often standing within one hour.
- Aim to time sedation so that calves have a decent amount of time to wake up, ready for their afternoon feed, to mitigate any potential drop in milk intakes and subsequent growth.

If you would like to discuss a bespoke disbudding/ castration plan for your farm, call us on 01765 602396



Written by Katharine Shepherd,BVMS CertAVP (Cattle) MRCVS


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PRECISION GRAZING.

Hooves, Habitats and Herd Economics

There is significant growth in global 'precision grazing' technologies, including geo-fencing, drones, long-range wireless networks, and AI-linked cameras. These advancements enhance animal welfare, productivity, and profitability on a large scale.

Join us with former Gurkha officer and Nuffield Scholar, Alex Crawley who has won several farming accolades with his business Grazing Management Ltd. Hear how grazing livestock can restore habitats and still pay their way. Alex will share practical lessons on making conservation grazing stack up financially, how technology such as virtual fencing is changing the way stock are managed on difficult land, and what it means for herd health and performance. Whether you are curious about new income streams or simply want fresh ideas for your own grazing, bring your questions and join the discussion.

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BOOK NOW

To book call 01765 602396



Transition Milk: Making the Most of Days 2 to 5

Emphasis on good quality colostrum feeding is now widely widespread. But what comes next? *Phil Alcock* discusses.

Most farms now know the 'four Qs' of effective colostrum management *Quickly* feeding sufficient *Quantity* of *Quality* Colostrum, *Quietly* without stress or contamination.

We rightly focus on the first one or two feeds as a key moment that will impact the heifer calf for the rest of her life. What happens during the feeds that follow has received less attention but this has started to change recently.

The milk produced over roughly the first two to five days after calving is known as 'transition milk', and more farms are feeding it deliberately rather than switching calves straight to milk replacer or whole milk.

What makes it special?

Transition milk sits between colostrum and normal milk. Compared with whole milk, it is richer in fat, protein and energy, and it still carries high levels of antibodies, growth factors and bioactive compounds. Its antibodies are no substitute for proper colostrum on day one, because the calf's ability to absorb them across the gut falls away quickly. But they continue to act locally in the gut, where scour-causing bugs do their damage.

The Benefits

- **Gut health**. Transition milk supports development of the gut lining at a time when the calf is most vulnerable to scour.
- **Local protection**. Antibodies that stay in the gut help against pathogens like rotavirus, coronavirus, E. coli and Cryptosporidium.
- **Energy and growth**. The higher solids content helps calves through the first week, especially in cold weather.
- **Fewer treatments**. Many farms report fewer scour cases and less antibiotic and fluid use, though research results vary between herds and management systems.

Cryptosporidium – one of the biggest challenges.

Cryptosporidiosis is one of the most significant causes of scour in young calves, and it is hard to control. The parasite survives in the environment, is resistant to most disinfectants, and is also a zoonosis, so farm staff and visiting children are at risk.

Continued overleaf

Transition Milk: Making the Most of Days 2 to 5 Continued

Bovilis Cryptium is a vaccine for pregnant cows and heifers. It works by raising antibodies against a C. parvum protein called Gp40 in the dam's colostrum, so calves are protected passively once they drink it. It does not vaccinate the calf directly. This is where transition milk matters: the manufacturer states that protection depends on calves ingesting both colostrum and transition milk from vaccinated cows. The recommendation is to feed colostrum and transition milk through the first five days, with at least three litres of colostrum in the first six hours. Passive protection has been demonstrated up to two weeks of age in calves that received colostrum and transition milk as directed.

The protocol is two doses of 2 ml under the skin of the neck, four to five weeks apart in the third trimester, with the second dose at least three weeks before calving. Cows then need a single booster in each later pregnancy.

Although the vaccine works in a similar way to 'Rotavirus vaccines' such as Fencovis, the nature of Crypto and the type of immunity generated means that transition milk feeding is required to get a good result.

The vaccine won't suit every farm situation but on an increasing number of farms we are finding success in control Crypto scours and reducing reliance on treatments.

In some cases where Crypto was reasonably well controlled we are noticing calves being more vigorous which may indicate that subclinical disease that was dragging them down is being combated.

The Main Take-Aways

- **Colostrum comes first**. Transition milk follows good colostrum feeding, not instead of it. Failure of passive transfer on day one cannot be fixed on day three.
- **Hygiene**. Transition milk is easily contaminated, and bacterial counts rise fast if it sits at room temperature. Clean buckets, bottles and tubes, and chill or freeze it promptly, more whole milk in the system often requires extra management consideration.



- **Pooling colostrum**. Mixing milk from many cows can pose specific disease risks such as Johne's, Salmonella or Mycoplasma. So this is an important consideration to plan with your vet.
- **Workload and labour**. Collecting, storing and feeding extra milk for several days takes time, a reliable repeatable system isn't always easy to deliver.
- **Transition milk feeding even when boosted by vaccination is not a magic bullet**. Such practices can help tip the balance of health versus disease in your favour, but the end result will still be impacted by other big factors affecting disease challenge, such as milk hygiene, dry bedding, clean calving areas and prompt isolation of scouring calves are still essential.

If the potential benefits are of interest to you then it would be be worth exploring with your vet how they could be translated into processes that would fit with your farm.

Written by Phil Alcock, BVetMed CertCHP DipRN MRCVS



Client News

BFA BRITISH FARMING AWARDS 2026 | supported by Morrisons

Congratulations to the Johnsons of Mallard Grange who have won Regenerative Farmer of the Year at the British Farming Awards.

Mallard Grange has introduced adaptive multi-paddock grazing, allowing areas of grassland longer periods to rest and recover. Diverse herbal leys and cover crops have also been incorporated into the farming system to encourage deeper roots and improve soil structure and biological activity.

The farm has moved towards lower-input cattle and sheep genetics that are better suited to thriving on grass and forage. This has supported outdoor lambing and reduced the reliance on additional feed and treatments.

Mallard Grange no longer uses worming products on its cattle and has substantially reduced their use across the sheep flock. Its pasture-raised hens follow grazing livestock in mobile units, naturally fertilising the land while helping to control flies and ticks.



Training Dates 2026-2027

DIY AI, 3 Day Course, £550 + VAT

Wed 25th Nov - Fri 27th Nov

Wed 16th Dec - Fri 18th Dec

Mastering Medicines, Online Course, £50 + VAT

Thursday 26th November

Thursday 17th December

Lambing and Foot Trimming - TBC

For more information or to book a course, please call 01756 602396 or email training@bishoptonvets.co.uk

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