

# nantwich farm vets



Nantwich Farm Vets  
Hurleston, Nantwich  
Cheshire  
CW5 6BU

24hr phone line: 01270 610349



October 2019

## Dates for your diary

**Mon 11<sup>th</sup> Nov**    **Medicines Course**  
11:15am        See back page for details

**21-24 Oct**        **Dairyland Foot-trimming Course**  
See back page for details

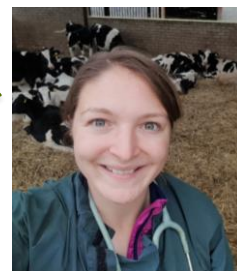
Wet wet wet. Nantwich Show called off in July. Then the Ploughing Match last month. A massive loss in our normal social calendar! Much sympathy to all of you still trying to get crops or forage in from the fields.

Thanks to those who supported our Macmillans Coffee Morning and helped us raise around £150!

## Team News

No good byes this month! Instead a big welcome to **Alvaro Selva** has joined our TB-testing team, **Chloe Harding** who has come on board as a vet tech and TB tester, and **Zoe Waterson** who will be our newest addition to the vet team later this month (more from her below). It's also great to see **Laura** back and fully recovered from surgery after her appendicitis!

Hi! I'm Zoe and I graduated from the University of Liverpool in 2016. Since graduation I have worked solely in farm practice with a dairy focus and I truly enjoy my role as a farm vet. I have an interest in youngstock performance and monitoring as well as overall farm performance. I also enjoy surgery and working up tricky cases. In my spare time I like to keep fit in the gym, go walking with my Labrador and am a member of Cheshire YFC. I look forward to meeting all of you and getting out on farm.



Around the office we are also excited to have **Nicky Bowden** in a business development role:

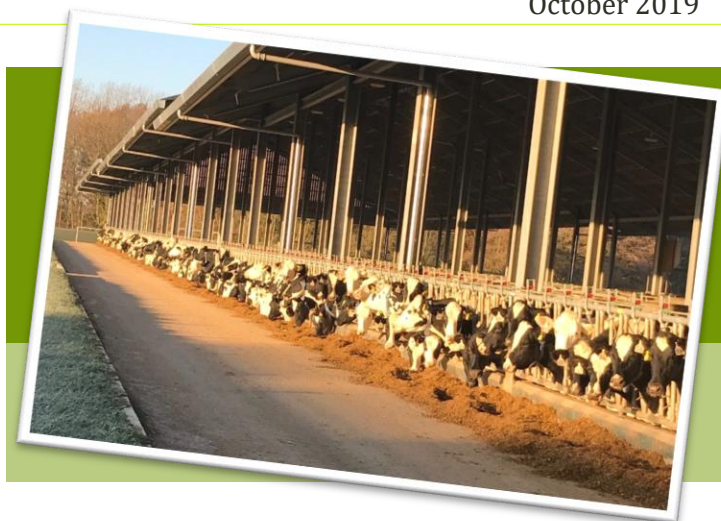


I grew up on a dairy farm between Chester and Wrexham and was an active member of Malpas Young farmers for a number of years. I graduated from Glasgow Vet School in 2007, I worked in predominantly dairy practice, including a year in New Zealand. I have spent the past few years working outside of traditional veterinary practice, running discussion groups for AHDB Dairy and more recently with the pharmaceutical company Boehringer Ingelheim. I have joined the practice in a non-clinical, business development role where I will be working to continue to develop the excellent work the practice do and to ensure that we continue to meet the needs of our clients in the future. If you have any ideas on areas I need to be developing please get in touch.

Outside of work my husband Dan and I have two children, so most of my life is taken up with them, but if I get the chance you will find me busy in my garden.

# Top tips for managing large herds

**Rob George** recently wrote for the Holstein UK Journal with these pointers for expanding herds, but can be applied to any of our farms



Over the last few decades there has been an increasing trend towards specialisation within the country's dairy herds. The daily mechanics of feeding, breeding, milking and health care of large groups of cows and the planning for labour, facilities and the capital to handle them has made the management of large dairies as complex as managing large corporations. Specialisation and increasing size of dairy herds has developed because of efficiencies of scale – and herdspersons and managers of hundreds or thousands of cows now encounter problems never dreamed of by the smaller family farms which were the norm decades ago.

As a practice we're fortunate to be involved in a good number of large, well-run dairies. There are certainly various tips that most dairies would highlight as being important, even critical, to the development and success of their business.

There is a long list of important aspects to running a dairy herd of any size – and there isn't scope within this article to cover anywhere near all of them. I'll therefore highlight five important tips that, from my experience working with all dairies, I feel can be easily overlooked – especially within large enterprises (but applicable to any unit). They are important to running an efficient and sustainable herd.

## 1. Labour management

I asked the other vets for their top five tips, and all came back with labour management among their priorities. The dairies that get the best out of their staff have regular, structured meetings. Generally held monthly or quarterly, they ensure team members all have the chance to have their say. These meetings shouldn't be dominated by the owner or manager and they should also occasionally involve vets and nutritionists. Involving staff in the decision-making process when it comes to their roles and routines encourages compliance.

*Monthly or quarterly meetings ensure team members all have the chance to have their say*

Training for staff is critical – especially new staff. As an example, I've seen mastitis outbreaks on farms where milking protocols and SOPs haven't been properly shown and explained to new members of staff. Such training is key to the smooth running of any dairy. The roles for staff must be defined, and arrangements made for the provision of necessary equipment and environment to enable the job to be carried out efficiently and successfully. Get outsiders in for various training. We do a lot of on-farm training and group training at the practice.

An approachable management helps the labour force be honest with them and communicate any issues or mishaps, whether staff made or not. Good communication along the management line will always help teamwork.

Aim for adequate staff numbers. Manage their hours appropriately. The best-run units (generally, also the most profitable) are very rarely short-staffed. Jobs get done. This also helps with rotas and flexibility with time off, keeping a content workforce. I was once told: "When running a business one must delegate and communicate. Be a student of human behaviour. Understand and realize what motivates behaviour." I'm not sure I've grasped that myself, to be honest.



Figure 1: SOPs like this help farm staff get jobs done correctly and the same way every time



## 2. Protocols / Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

Although this may sound basic to some and irrelevant to others, concise and understandable protocols are critical for any business.

It happens. Good intentions with good directions fall apart with poor implementation or misunderstanding – colostrum didn't get fed at all or was of inadequate quantity or quality; hutches didn't get cleaned out, etc. It just happens. The use of on-farm protocols is one way to help managers and employees get jobs done correctly, on time and the same way....every time.

On most of the large dairies I visit, protocols/SOPs are written for everything from teat preparation and milking the cow, to feeding and managing the new-born calf and even washing milk buckets correctly.

## 3. Transition period management

There isn't the opportunity here to go into any sort of detail, but the transition period will make or break a lactation, and quite possibly the entire productive life of a dairy cow. Do it right and cows are primed for healthy, productive lactations. Do it wrong and cows languish in the fresh group or hospital pen and become early cull candidates.

Instead of thinking that the transition is about disease control, think of it as a production and reproduction opportunity. The goals should be to optimise milk production and maintain or minimise body condition loss, metabolic disease and immuno-competence, as well as encouraging good future fertility plus the birth of healthy calves. The best dairies achieve this most of the time.

## 4. Record keeping and data analysis

Monitor performance, disease incidence, fertility, youngstock growth rates etc so they can be easily assessed, and an evidence-based decision can be made to improve any particular issue. The importance of this is overlooked or even dismissed by too many dairies. Regardless of your size, this is so important, but when you are big you can suffer big losses with poor monitoring.

## 5. Cow comfort

This is probably the most important of my top tips. This is often the biggest bottleneck to production and health on many farms.

There has been much time-lapse video analysis carried out in cubicle sheds over the last decade or so. In sheds with comfortable cubicles, there is always order. Cows are either eating/drinking or lying in cubicles. Cows lie in cubicles for long periods of time and do not get up and down frequently. Cows lie down quickly when they enter the cubicle and appear to fit into them well.

*Cow comfort is often the biggest bottleneck to production and health on many farms*

Sheds with poor cow comfort appear to be in a state of chaos. Cows just walk around or stand in cubicles, shift weight from limb to limb and lie down for small periods of time. You may see cows standing by the cubicle wondering if they should lie in them or not.

Dr Tom Overton of Cornell University cites six key housing aspects of cow comfort, health and well-being:

- Water, with access to clean palatable water at least 21 hours per day
- Light, with at least six hours of darkness
- Air that is fresh and clean



Figure 2: good cow comfort is vital

- Rest, with a dry and comfortable place to lie down for 12-14 hours per day, including six hours of rumination
- Space, so cows can walk to feed and water troughs from their cubicles without fear (two to three hours standing and walking in passageways and half an hour drinking)
- Feed, with a palatable and well formulated diet, on offer for at least 21 hours per day. Cows eat for five and-a-half hours per day broken up into 9-14 meals. So, with resting 12-14 hours, standing two to three hours and drinking for half an hour, total time needed is about 21 hours. This gives one hour away from the shed for milking for three periods per day.

Collecting yard standing times is one of my biggest bugbears with dairies. This should be one hour maximum per milking on a three-times-a-day regime.

As I said at the beginning, this is far from a complete list, but I will leave you with one more. A friend working in another industry told me: "Choose your friends carefully and your advisors wisely". Be selective about who you listen to and what information you subject yourself to. Mix with like-minded people and go and see how other good units are run.

# Rest Farm-Assured

There are some significant changes to the Red Tractor Farm Assurance dairy standards as of this month, relevant to all dairy farms. The ones that we as vets are particularly involved with are detailed below. These aren't just things that can be done the day before your Farm Assurance visit, so please take the time to discuss these and bring them up to date with your vet well in advance. These are all fantastic opportunities to look at current strategies for disease control and management and make any changes that could be needed.



- **BVD Eradication Plan** – most of you have got involved with the BVD Stamp It Out scheme, with monitoring and putting a vaccination and management plan in place.
- **Johne's Control Strategy** – most herds will be requiring a review/update to the plan in the next few months. You should have received a form from your milk company that requires discussion of the current management plan and signing by a BCVA Accredited Johne's Veterinary Advisor (most of us at the practice!).
- **TB policy** – if you have had input from the TB Advisory service we offer (following a breakdown, or just if you wanted input for improving farm biosecurity), this should be included in the herd health plan.
- **Medicine Training Course** – this was previously a recommendation but has now become a full standard –at least one (current!) member of staff who is responsible for administering medicines is required to attend an approved medicines training course, since 1<sup>st</sup> Oct 2016. We will be providing a series of these as required over the coming months (see below with details for the first one), so do contact the office to put your name down if you're interested.

# Upcoming Meetings

## MEDICINE TRAINING COURSE + MILKSURE PART 1

**Monday 11th November, 11:15am - Nantwich Farm Vets, Hurleston, CW5 6BU - £65**

This course provides a broad look at medicines that are commonly used on farm, what they are for, how they should be stored and used responsibly. 'Responsible use of antibiotics' is a common catchphrase in the industry, with the aim of reducing unnecessary treatments, and making sure when we do treat we are doing so as effectively as possible and minimizing resistance. This course also includes the first half of the Milksure course, involving discussion on minimizing risk of residue and milk failures. If you are interested in the full Milksure course, an on-farm visit to provide the second half can be arranged at a later date. Attendees will be given a certificate of competence and will meet the standards required by Red Tractor Farm Assurance.

## FOOT TRIMMING COURSE

**October 21<sup>st</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> - Nantwich Farm Vets, Hurleston, CW5 6BU**



Having one of your farm team well-trained, competent and keen on keeping your cows mobile is a key aspect for herd health and production. This course provides theory and hands-on practical experience with knives and grinders over four days, and is perfect for first-timers or old-timers when it comes to trimming! Our October course is full, but we will be running another in the spring. Get in touch with Steve or the office if you want to get your name down.

### Vets Mobile Numbers

Dave Shaw	07836 335185
Rob George	07773 384450
John Manson	07813 690860
John Yarwood	07814 791109
Stuart Russell	07770 448179
Peter Duncalfe	07717 780604
Laura Donovan	07800 647608

Steven Crowe	07891 843694
Mike Wilkinson	07866 257014
Amy Cox	07966 833870
Sarah Williamson	07812 173942
Joe Mitchell	07773 342345
Craig Scarisbrick	07958 361378
Eleri James	07958 361278
Zoe Waterson	07891 843573

### Vet Tech Services

Laura Tomlinson 07889 794981



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