



nantwich
farm vets LLP

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photo: Izzy Rutter

Amy's Netherlands Tour

In October I was lucky enough to be selected to go on a study tour to the Netherlands with an antimicrobial stewardship group that I am part of: Arwain DGC. Arwain DGC is a government-funded group which leads on responsible use of antimicrobials in Wales. I have been a "prescribing champion" representing Nantwich Farm Vets since it was established in 2019, due to us having some sheep and cattle clients in North Wales.

The purpose of the study tour was to experience first-hand how the ruminant industry in the Netherlands is reducing risks related to anti-microbial resistance (AMR) and we followed an action-packed agenda from dawn til dusk for four days.

At the **Lely and Nedap factories** we saw their latest technology for improving cow health. The Dutch are extremely innovative and there is widespread adoption of robotic milking and feeding systems on farms in the country; a very data-driven management approach. Superior technology enables earlier detection of disease and prompt treatment where necessary, in order to potentially reduce the need for larger volumes of antimicrobials to be used as part of treatment courses.

We learnt a lot about the **veal industry**, visiting rearing farms, research facilities and processing plants. Most veal production in the Netherlands is



rose veal (referring to the colour of the meat). Some aspects of the veal system came as a bit of a shock to several of us but we had to embrace some of the findings in context, as we have nothing comparable in the UK. Young calves travel an awfully long way to collection centres (often located in other European countries), and are then mixed with thousands of calves from other farms which makes a huge disease "bath" from which calves are then dispersed onto their rearing farms. The industry prides itself in utilising the whole carcass including the hide from an efficiency point of view. All farms we visited upheld high levels of biosecurity to prevent disease incursion. The majority of veal produced is exported. There is no beef industry in the Netherlands; all beef is imported.

We visited a **sheep farm** which had faced terrible morbidity and mortality (along with many farms in the Netherlands) during the recent Bluetongue outbreak. The Dutch version of the NSA works closely with its farmers and they presented us with an insight into some of the scenes faced by Dutch sheep farmers. The videos of some of the symptoms were hard to watch. The vaccine dramatically reduced disease severity and played a crucial role in protecting animal health and mortality in the country. It is estimated that around 95% of their national flock are now vaccinated. Vaccination will continue to be a priority for protecting UK flocks from BTV this coming year.

We also visited **academic institutions** where AMR was at the forefront of their research.

The Netherlands have reduced their national antibiotic use by 76.4% since 2009 which is impressive. This has been achieved through collaboration between sectors and, importantly, changes in legislation. There is strict regulation around antimicrobial use, supply, and recording by vets and farmers. The contrasts with the UK are that a small amount of antimicrobials can



be kept on farm but farmers are under strict instruction as to what can be used and under what circumstances, and if their “first line” has not worked they have to call for veterinary involvement before further treatment can be administered. Rules are particularly strict around metaphylactic use (batch treatment); a commonly used route of administration in veal units. All antimicrobial use is recorded nationally and individual farms’ usages are monitored with intervention where necessary.

Reducing antibiotic usage and minimising risk of developing resistance through earlier identification of sick animals, prompt treatment, correct dosing and administration of the right antibiotic, and recording of all treatments, is a key part of our discussions with clients in the Antibiotic Report (part of the annual herd health plan review), alongside the training provided in our Medicines courses. If you are due a review or an update for either of these, give us a bell!

Directly Debiting

Our lovely back office team have been working behind the scenes to enable the use of Direct Debits for payment of monthly invoices. For anyone wishing to remove the hassle of paying their invoice by BACS or cheque, you can now call our office on 01270 610349 Monday to Thursday and ask to speak to Belle. She will set you up on our system, confirm your preferred payment date each month, and that’s about it! At the beginning of each month you’ll then receive an email confirming that month’s payment amount and date. You’ll still receive your statements as normal, and all direct debits are protected by the Direct Debit guarantee. If you choose to cancel your direct debit mandate at any time you can do so by contacting the office to revert to previous payment methods. Hopefully all fairly straightforward, but if you have any questions don’t hesitate to get in touch!



Team News

We introduced you to two of our newest Vet Techs last month, now to introduce you to our third!

Shelley Holt is a local farmer’s daughter from Sandbach, and has worked in agriculture all her life, with particular involvement in youngstock management and cattle fertility. In her spare time you will find her training border collies and decorating cakes while listening to Coldplay!



Optimizing Photoperiod for Dairy Production

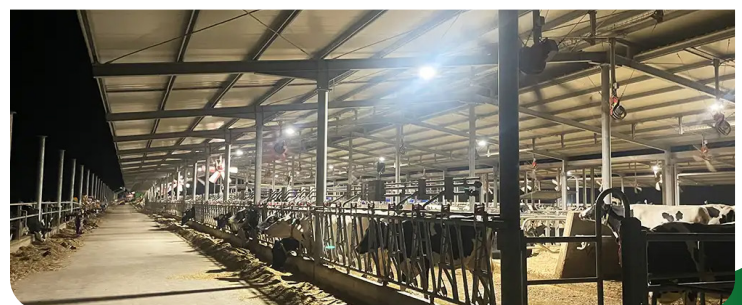
With natural daylight limited during certain times of the year, managing light exposure is a cost-effective, non-nutritional strategy to boost milk yield in high-producing dairy cows. Photoperiod—the daily duration of light exposure—regulates endocrine function, metabolism, and lactation physiology. Manipulating photoperiod through controlled lighting can enhance milk production and fertility in modern herds. Research shows consistent benefits from long-day photoperiods (LDPP) during lactation and short-day photoperiods (SDPP) during the dry period.

Light affects melatonin secretion from the pineal gland. Melatonin regulates sleep-wake cycles, seasonal rhythms, stress responses, and immune function. Its production is higher in darkness and lower in daylight. Melatonin also influences prolactin and insulin-like growth factor I (IGF-I). Prolactin, from the anterior pituitary, supports lactation and mammary tissue growth, while IGF-I drives milk yield, lactation persistency, and mammary development.

During lactation, LDPP (16–18 hours light, 6–8 hours dark) suppresses melatonin, raising prolactin and IGF-I levels. Recommended light intensity is 150–200 lux at cow eye level, with darkness below 5 lux. LDPP can increase milk yield by 5–15%, especially in cows producing over 40 kg/day, due to greater mammary capacity. LDPP also raises feed intake by 3–10%, as IGF-I boosts metabolism and appetite. Longer light periods increase activity and feeding time.

Dry cows benefit from SDPP (8 hours light, 16 hours dark), which extends melatonin duration. This improves immune function, promotes mammary tissue involution and regeneration, resulting in 5–10% higher milk production in the following lactation. Light intensity recommendations mirror LDPP, with consistency and uninterrupted darkness being critical. Red light can be used during dark periods for both schedules.

Optimising photoperiod is a simple, high-impact strategy: lactating cows under long-day light, dry cows under short-day light. Small adjustments in lighting can yield significant milk production gains. Speak to us if you are thinking about installing lighting and need some advice.



AHDB Herd Genetic Reports

Genetics plays an increasingly important role in dairy herd health and performance, yet it is often underused as a practical management tool. The **AHDB Herd Genetic Report** provides a clear, accessible summary of the genetic strengths and weaknesses within a herd and, when used correctly, can support better long-term decision making.

The report brings together milk recording, pedigree and genomic data to show how a herd performs for key traits such as Profitable Lifetime Index (PLI), fertility, lifespan, somatic cell count and production. From a veterinary perspective, these traits closely link to many of the issues we see on farm, including poor fertility, high mastitis rates and short cow longevity.

At herd level, the report allows us to step back and assess genetic direction which accurately manages limitations within the genetics of the herd. Herds that have historically selected heavily for yield often show weaker fertility or health traits, which can place greater pressure on management and increase veterinary intervention. Understanding this helps ensure breeding goals are realistic and aligned with the farm's system and resources.

At cow level, the report supports more targeted breeding and culling decisions. Where youngstock are not genetically superior to the current herd, genetic progress is effectively standing still. From a veterinary perspective, this raises questions around heifer rearing cost, replacement rate and whether the herd is carrying more animals than necessary to maintain output. High genetic merit cows can be prioritised for sexed semen, while lower-merit animals may be better suited to beef semen.

Inbreeding trends are also highlighted within the report. Gradual increases in inbreeding are often associated with reduced fertility and resilience before obvious performance losses occur, making early identification important.

When reviewed routinely alongside fertility KPIs, culling data and health records, AHDB Herd Genetic Reports support evidence-based breeding decisions that enhance herd health, longevity and economic sustainability. As a practice we are able to look at your herd genetic report and offer advice and guidance, if this is something you would be interested in please let us know.



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Contact 07967559594 / talk@agchap.com / agchap.com

Dates for your diary

Thurs 26th February, 10:30am
Medicines Course

Farmers assured through Red Tractor need to update on one of these courses (or similar) every five years, so these courses are very popular. £70+VAT. Includes a hot lunch!

NFV WhatsApp Communities

For those of you that have missed the opportunity to join our NFV Dairy Community on WhatsApp a couple of months ago, this is the best way to keep up-to-date and connect with what is going on, new services, meetings and other news. And for our sheep clients, we have an NFV Sheep Community just for you too! Just scan the relevant QR code below using your phone camera and follow the link.



Get in touch...



nantwich
farm vets LLP

Hurleston, Nantwich, Cheshire CW5 6BU



01270 610349



office@nantwichfarmvets.co.uk
orders@nantwichfarmvets.co.uk



www.nantwichfarmvets.co.uk

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