



nantwich
farm vets LLP

MARCH 2026

Erica's Spring Newborn Checklist

As spring is upon us, I am rapidly finding myself meeting more of our lovely clients throughout the practice as we deal with the typical spring emergencies. I am very grateful for the kind welcome (and cups of tea) I have received and look forward to meeting more of you over the coming months.

Spring brings not just daffodils and the Easter bunny, but a busy time of year on farm with lambing and calving season upon us. Lambing and calving seem to bring a different challenge every year on farm, but ensuring the fundamentals are met can go a long way to ensuring a successful season. Targeting the following areas can help reduce disease and mortality, and maximise performance for both calves and lambs;



Pre-calving/lambing nutrition

- Ensure cows/ewes are in good body condition
 - » Feed concentrates as needed
- Review your forage stocks and supplement appropriately
 - » Colostrum requires dietary starch and protein!

Colostrum Management

- Remember the 4 Qs!
 - » Quickly - within 6h
 - » Quantity - 10% BWV (4L for a 40kg calf)
 - » Quality - check with a refractometer (get in touch if you need one or advice using it)
 - » SQueaky Clean - don't leave sat around in open buckets for bacteria to multiply!



Lambing/calving pen hygiene

- Keep it clean and dry
- Most scour bugs are picked up in the lambing/calving pen

Minimise Cold Stress

- Cold stress/ hypothermia increases mortality in lambs and calves
- Clean dry straw - and lots of it!
- Use heat lamps and calf jackets for higher risk animals

Lambing and calving are an exciting time of year, but equally can be very stressful particularly when things are not quite where you want them. If things don't seem quite right or it feels the right time to review current protocols please speak to us for some advice.

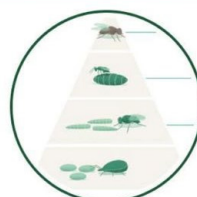


BESTICO

FREE FARMER MEETING!

BIOLOGICAL FLY CONTROL

**DON'T LET 2026 BE
THE YEAR OF THE FLY!**



Fly populations will soon start to rise - key to minimising fly numbers is to prevent them establishing in the first place.

Join NFV and Bestico to learn how Biowasp and Biofly can make a significant difference to fly populations on farm.

FREE HOT FOOD & REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED



Wednesday
4th March 2026



Brindley Hall Farm
Brindley Hall Road
Nantwich
CW5 8JA



11am - 1pm

By kind permission of the Ford family

Book your place: <https://www.nantwichfarmvets.co.uk/biofly>

Can you just turn the milk tap off?

As I (John M) start to write this article many of our dairy clients are experiencing extremely challenging months ahead. There has been a raft of measures announced or already introduced by milk buyers to try to negate the oversupply of milk. These include serving notice, only paying 1ppl for milk produced over 102% of the equivalent month last year or reducing "A" litre volumes by 20% and paying the difference at "B" litre price (likely to be single figures). These are all desperate measures and the response needs to be carefully considered by all of you affected to maintain a viable business. Here I'm going to look at a few of the options as to how milk production could be reduced with the pros and cons of each.

1. CULLING / SELLING MILKERS

I'm guessing this is the most obvious option but needs to be approached in a considered manner. Recently cow value has dropped a little but is still relatively good. I suspect it will have dropped further by the time March arrives. Choosing the correct cows to cull is the biggest challenge. I would probably suggest starting with Johnes' positive cows, however if you have a problem with Johnes' then just culling cows and not stopping new infections won't solve the issue. But that's a story for another newsletter! Another issue with culling a few cows is that it may not drop milk as expected, especially in systems where stocking density is on the high side. Fewer cows = more feed space and cubicles per cow = increased production!

2. EARLY DRY OFF / EXTENDING DRY PERIOD

The only way I can see this dramatically reducing milk output is if you were to dry off a month's worth of cows in a week. Drying off just a week ahead might produce the same increase in yield per cow that culling a few cows will have. The other thing that needs considering here is have you got space in the dry cow sheds for extra cows or will you need to sacrifice some space within milking cow sheds?

3. FEEDING WHOLE MILK TO CALVES

I'm sure this will happen on many farms. The biggest concern here is the risk of spreading Johnes' to heifer calves if you take milk straight out of the line. Pasteurisation is the obvious way around this.



However this is a big investment if you only plan to feed whole milk on a short term basis. The best way around this would be to group all known



Johnes' positive cows together and ensure all milk for calves is taken from the milk line before milking these cows.

4. REDUCE FEED RATES

Another option that might not be as simple as it sounds. I suspect in high yielding cows at early and peak lactation reducing the amount of concentrates fed won't lead to much of a drop off in production. These cows will just milk 'off their backs' and lose body condition. This will have subsequent effects on both health and future fertility for these cows. However pulling feed off later lactation and pregnant cows might achieve the desired results.

5. FEEDING MILK IN THE MILKERS' RATION

This is something I have no experience of but am aware a few clients tried it many years ago when the milk price crashed. Rob comments on it elsewhere in this newsletter! Ultimately milk is composed of protein, fat, lactose (sugars), vitamins & minerals and 87% water. Those already adding water to the diet should be able to reduce this if putting milk in. However it will still require careful tweaking of the overall diet to balance the additional fat, protein, sugar and vitamins & minerals.

I'm sure I've probably not covered all the options being considered but those of you in a position where you need to think on your feet regarding milk volumes please do chat with any of us about it. We are here to help and advise where we can. Good luck!

Prevention Planning

It's the time of year where we are working with farmers to put a plan together for their biological fly control programs, **Biowasp** or **Biofly**. These are most effective if started prior to any fly populations developing, so contact the office to get your orders in place. If you want to know more then get in touch or come to our March meeting!

It's also worth thinking through what your flock or herd needs for **Bluetongue protection** this year. The virus over-wintered in the UK, so once midge populations are active the disease will circulate once more, so we would recommend vaccination with Bultavo. Any bovine animals that were vaccinated last year will only require a single-dose booster this time around. In order for us to best manage and maintain sufficient stocks for all our clients, it would be helpful for our office team to hear from you in the next couple of weeks if you are planning on vaccinating for BTV.



Feeding Milk to Cows

I (Rob) have witnessed many milk price fluctuations during my 26 years at Nantwich Farm Vets, but the drop between October 2025 and now has been unprecedented, with some producers seeing reductions of 14–15p/L. Encouragingly, there is cautious optimism ahead, with GB milk production forecast to stabilise this year and grow only marginally (around 0.3%). Even so, total output remains at record levels.

Much discussion has centred on contract management strategies that have created B and even C litres, or imposed maximum thresholds such as 102% of the same month's production last year. One approach raised (see John's article) is feeding surplus milk back to cows through the TMR. I recall this being done on several farms during the quota pressures of the early 2000s.

Milk certainly has feed value. Roughly four litres of whole milk will replace 1kg of a medium-energy 27% concentrate. However, feeding raw milk brings significant concerns. These include disease transmission, ration spoilage, odours, flies, and the practicalities of storage and handling. Feeding unpasteurised milk carries some risk of spreading Johne's disease—probably low and often unknown in lactating cows—but still a consideration depending on herd status. The potential spread of TB, mycoplasma, and salmonella through milk is a more tangible concern and should not be underestimated.

Adding unpasteurised milk to TMR can also cause spoilage and unpleasant odours due to microbial growth, particularly in warm weather. This proved to be the main issue when the practice was used previously. Feeding TMR twice daily may help mitigate spoilage, but careful monitoring of feed intakes is essential. Under no circumstances should milk be fed to dry or transition cows, given the heightened risk of reduced intakes and subsequent metabolic problems around calving. Close attention to TMR dry matter is also critical.

Flies present another challenge. In US states where feeding milk back to cows is permitted, TMR preservatives and insect regulators are often incorporated to manage these risks. Logistically, transferring milk from the bulk tank to the feeder wagon is also far from straightforward.

In my view, the disease risks and high likelihood of spoilage outweigh the financial benefits of managing surplus milk this way. Importantly, cows are not taps; when milk prices recover, they must be ready and able to milk.

FETF

Applications for final round of grants from the **Farming Equipment and Technology Fund** open on 17th March for six weeks. As with previous grants, this will subsidise equipment to improve productivity, slurry management and animal health and welfare, with grants of up to £25000. Follow the link above for online information on how to apply and what you can apply for. It's definitely something to take advantage of to improve productivity and management on your farm!

Dates for your diary

Wed 4th March, 11am - 1pm
Biological Fly Control
See front page for details

Thurs 23rd April, 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.



Nantwich Farm Vets
Dairy Community
WhatsApp community



Nantwich Farm Vets
Sheep Community
WhatsApp community



Get in touch...



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