



Cherry Laurel is another plant poison which can cause difficulty breathing, seizures, collapse and sudden death.

ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION | BLUETONGUE | TOXIC PLANTS | COW ABORTION | PSF

Using Artificial Insemination in the Beef Herd Jack Wight BVMS MRCVS

Artificial insemination will likely be the furthest thing from your mind as we approach (or are already in the midst of) spring calving. However, given the logistics involved; selecting and sourcing semen, and organising dates for a synchro-program, a bit of forward preparation definitely makes the process smoother!

Typically, a synchronisation protocol looks something like:

Day	Action
0	Insert CIDR and inject GnRH (Receptal)
7	Inject Prostaglandin (Estrumate)
8	Remove CIDR (+/- inject PMSG)
10	First service and inject GnRH (Receptal) (48 hours after CIDR removed)
11	Second service (72 hours after CIDR removed)



This could be tweaked to allow for just a single service which would be 56 hours post CIDR removal.

This is just an example of a protocol, which could be adapted depending on your individual circumstances so it is always worth a conversation with your herd vet to discuss the particulars.

For block calving herds, synchronising and using AI in late calving cows, could be a good way of bringing them forward. Synchronising cows such that they are served on the first few days of the mating window, gives them a chance at a conception on this day, and at least ensures they cycle on this date so that if they don't get in calf, the bull has a few more chances to catch her.

For herds breeding their own replacements, sexed semen could be used on heifers to speed up the timeframe with which you're introducing desirable genetics to your female lines, or could be considered for some of your top cows to try to get a heifer replacement and continue her line.

Where cows are within correct body condition range, trace elements and infectious diseases are under control we would expect 60% conception rate for a synchronised service, as good as most bulls on a single service!

A synchro protocol involves a lot of handlings which won't suit every farm and doing every animal in a large herd would be a Herculean task! There are, however, some specific applications which could benefit any herd and are worth taking into consideration. As always, speak to your vet to find out more.

Bluetongue

We have now held several practice meetings covering the emerging Bluetongue situation. The situation is constantly changing and the possibility of vaccination in Scotland is still unclear. The most up to date information can be found at:

<https://ruminanthw.org.uk/bluetongue-virus/>

Bluetongue is a notifiable animal disease. If you suspect it you must report it immediately by calling:

- Defra Rural Services Helpline on **03000 200 301** in England
- In Scotland, contact your local Field Services Office on **03000 600 711**

Failure to do so is an offence.

If you have any questions about the Bluetongue situation please speak to your vet.

Clinical Signs of Bluetongue 3

	Cattle	Sheep
Most Common	Malaise	Nasal discharge
	Lameness	Malaise
	Ulceration	Swollen Face
	Red membranes	Crusting
	Conjunctivitis	Hypersalivation
	Crusting	Red membranes
	Coronitis	Lameness
	Pyrexia	Inappetance
Least Common	Nasal discharge	Ulceration
	Hypersalivation	Pyrexia
	Reluctance to move	Reluctance to move

What to do if a cow aborts?

- Isolate cow
- Collect all aborted calf and placenta
- Phone surgery to arrange abortion enquiry (BS7) test
- Discuss possibly sending more samples to lab

Some level of abortion (1-2%) can be normal in a herd and due to non-infectious causes however we have to consider that an early, dead calf could be the first of many so it should be investigated.

Legally, under the The Brucellosis Orders, **any abortion must be notified to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)** and this can be done by initially reporting it to us at the surgery. Usually APHA then request and pay for the collection of samples to rule out Brucellosis. Abortions should be notified within 24 hours.

Beyond the compulsory abortion investigation, it is recommended to submit the foetus, maternal blood, and as much placenta as possible to SAC Greycrook to try and establish a cause for the abortion. As the abortion products are often autolysed a diagnosis may not always be found so continued submission of samples is recommended.

Toxic Plants and Forage Scarcity Sara Shaffer BVM&S MRCVS

Springtime poses a risk of toxin exposure to livestock. If forage is scarce, cattle and sheep may begin grazing plants that they would otherwise ignore. Some plants are more palatable in springtime, whereas some plants are generally only grazed when there are few other options. Ensuring fences are maintained and checking perimeters for specific plants will help reduce the risk of exposure.

Toxicity can vary between species, so knowing which plants are riskier to cattle versus sheep can be useful when assessing grazing areas. Please contact the vets in the event of any suspicious cases or sudden deaths, especially if multiple animals are involved. Although treatment of some of these toxicities may not always be possible, diagnosis will be crucial to the prevention of further losses.

Ragwort

While animals generally avoid eating this because of its bitter taste, the bitterness disappears after it is cut, making it more of a risk when it is not removed from hay or silage. Cattle are more sensitive to ragwort than sheep. Toxicity causes liver damage and is often seen as chronic weight loss and diarrhoea, with possible oedema under the jaw or at the brisket.

Bracken

Another bitter-tasting plant, livestock prefer the new shoots in spring rather than the woody stems in autumn. The toxic element in bracken interferes with bone marrow function, leading to anaemia and problems with blood clotting. Affected animals may be found dead or may be seen losing weight and off food. Bleeding from the nose or vagina may also be seen.

White Oak

The acorns and the leaves are toxic when ingested in larger quantities, as might occur when acorns drop into a field in autumn. Early signs such as constipation or bloat may be seen, followed by diarrhoea, weight loss, and weakness.

Water hemlock

This may be significant during periods of drought when the roots are exposed. The roots are quite palatable and are also the most toxic in the spring, becoming less dangerous as the plant grows. Toxicity occurs very quickly and can cause neurologic signs such as twitching and anxiety, progressing to seizures and death.



Alliums

These include onions and wild garlic. Cattle are more sensitive to Allium toxicity than sheep and goats. Cattle will preferentially graze onions, so it is advised to not add more than 25% dry matter weight into rations for calves. Allium toxicity causes anaemia, which can cause weakness and lethargy. Signs may take several days to appear, depending on the amount of plant eaten.

Rhododendron

This is the biggest risk to sheep in the winter, when access to grazing is reduced due to deep snow. The clippings are toxic, so access to garden waste should also be prevented. Signs of toxicity start with drooling and vomiting may even be seen, with the potential to progress to restlessness or weakness and difficulty breathing before eventual convulsions and death.



Pieris

These ornamental shrubs contain the same toxic substance as rhododendron, so the same signs will be seen in poisoned animals, and the clippings are similarly toxic.

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The **Preparing for Sustainable Farming Scheme** will be running for another year! Interventions undertaken in 2025 will now be eligible with claims to be submitted by the end of February 2026.

If you would like more information on this month's newsletter topics, please speak to any of our farm vet team.