

PCHS NEWS

Premium Cattle Health Schemes

2025 Issue



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PCHS NEWS

Welcome



Welcome to the 2025 edition of the **PCHS Newsletter**.

This issue includes an update on the CHECS John's Disease scheme, a case study on PCHS member Glenkiln Farms near

Dumfries, a reminder for best practices when buying in animals, info on our new health planning software and more.

We hope that you, your families and livestock are keeping safe and healthy. Please come and say hello when we are out and about at events as it gives us a chance to hear your feedback and learn about your individual experiences. We all wish you a successful year and thank you for your continued support!

John Scholefield

PCHS Advisory Group

The PCHS Advisory Group meets twice a year. At the most recent meeting the group visited SRUC's research farm at Easter Howgate (pictured). We thank all the members of the group for their continued commitment to the development of the health schemes.

Left to right: Neil Shand (NBA), Alison Braddock (SRUCVS), George Baikie (SRUC Research), Graeme Richardson (Thrum's Vets), Keith Cutler (Synergy Vets), Anne Seaton (SRUCVS), Bruce Wyper (SRUC Research), Robert Gilchrist (representing Aberdeen Angus Society), Harri Parri (Stabiliser Cattle Co), George Caldwell (SRUCVS)



HERDPLAN

Livestock Health Planning

Effective livestock health planning is an auditable, team driven process that continuously safeguards and improves animal health, welfare, and production efficiency.

SRUC Veterinary Services have been working on the development of the HerdPlan, a new health planning tool that aims to make effective beef and sheep health management quicker and easier for farmers and vets. The HerdPlan will be launched in Autumn 2024 and will be available through vet practices.

The HerdPlan offers several key features to support the health management of livestock:

Connected: Connects the whole farm team including farm staff, vets, nutritionists, and consultants, ensuring everyone is up-to-date with the latest information on farm and works together as a team.

Pro-active: Focuses on future risks, allowing the whole team to set health targets and continuously improve livestock health. Fully compliant: Helps the whole farm team stay compliant with Red Tractor and QMS requirements while saving time for both vets and farmers.

Effective: Prioritises prevention over cure, organises the whole farm team's to-do list and ensures that important tasks are not forgotten by sending reminders.

Dynamic: Adapts to real-world changes by allowing updated health and management protocols to be activated instantly when changes happen.

Focused and flexible: Allows the whole farm team to choose from a range of modules tailored to their farm's needs, prioritising work and focusing on what matters most to the farmer including production, infectious diseases, pneumonia and more.

Interested UK farmers (and/or the whole farm team) can register their interest at www.herdplan.co.uk and/or herdplan@sruc.ac.uk. Note that the HerdPlan's services and developments have been supported by the Scottish Government.



New Risk Level to Aid in Johne's Disease Control

This autumn, Cattle Health Certification Standards (CHECS) is introducing an additional level of Johne's Disease Risk-Level Certification – RL1*

The new Risk Level 1* will be awarded to RL1 herds which have a negative blood test for Johne's Disease. Risk Level 1 herds containing animals that have a blood positive test for Johne's, that are subsequently faecal negative, will not qualify for RL1* status.

Risk Level 1* status will also be accompanied by the number of consecutive years in brackets that herd has held the RL1* status. So, for a herd that has had no animal testing blood positive for four years, its classification will be RL1* (4 years).

The recommendation to add this additional risk level classification status was made by the CHECS Technical Advisory Group (TAG), following the universal agreement of the proposal by every member of the group, after careful consideration and deliberation of the latest scientific research available. The recommendation was put to the CHECS Board who has approved its introduction.

"It is highly likely, due to the high specificity of the serological tests used, that animals that test blood

positive are infected with *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies paratuberculosis (MAP), the cause of Johne's Disease," says Keith Cutler, Veterinary Director of CHECS and chair of TAG. "Faecal testing remains relevant to try to define whether an animal with a positive blood test is shedding MAP in its faeces and to guide the management of that animal within the herd. But retaining this animal in a herd, irrespective of a negative faecal test result, is a high-risk strategy."

In order to give all herds the opportunity to carry out testing to achieve the star (whilst making sure there is no advantage by being able to publish this before others have reached their testing date), the following process will apply: For any participants in the scheme whose herd test results show no seropositive animals for the year starting 1 October 2024, these results will count towards RL1* accreditation, but that RL1* herd status will not be published on certificates and pen cards until 1 October 2025.

The CHECS TAG will continue to review any relevant published scientific literature on faecal MAP testing methods and performance on an on-going basis with a view to ensuring that the CHECS Technical Document and the route by which an RL1 herd might gain RL1* status reflects the most up-to-date scientific knowledge.

This is an excerpt from the CHECS website, the full article can be read here: [New Johne's Disease Risk Level \(CHECS\)](#)

Pen Card Reminder

Please ensure that you get your Pen Card applications to us in plenty of time. It is your responsibility to complete the form in full – any requests for information to be added after the pen card has been printed will incur further production and postage charges. Please check with your breed society if you're unsure of the

testing or vaccination requirements for your sale.

Note: if your pen card application is received within one week of the sale date, we cannot guarantee that there will be enough time for card production. We also reserve the right to charge a late application fee.



Glenkiln Farm Partnership
 Bettyknowes, Crocketford
 Dumfries & Galloway

Glenkiln Farms, owned by the late Sir Henry Keswick, is located between Dumfries and Castle Douglas in South West Scotland. The farm is made up of a combination of hill, upland and lowland areas and is home to a herd of 900 breeding cows and a flock of over 3,000 breeding ewes.

For the past eight years the farm has been managed by John Wildman. With over 25 years' experience in keeping cattle and sheep, John is focused on continuing to grow the herd at Glenkiln, while also improving the herd health and optimising the herd's calving patterns.

John comments that he personally believes a mix of sheep and cattle is essential in a grassland area, as well as the land used for grazing, there is also land dedicated to arable production for home use, providing barley and a some of the farm's straw requirement. The herd is predominantly made up of crossbred cows, using a combination of Aberdeen Angus, Salers, and Simmental genetics for maternal breeding and the Charolais being used as a terminal sire.

Running a mostly closed herd, breeding their own replacements and only purchasing breeding bulls, two thirds of the herd calve in spring in April and

May, aiming for a maximum ten-week calving period. John adds that the first two thirds of the spring calving group are calved inside (with cows and calves put out within three days of calving), while the last third are calved outside before the disease burden increases and becomes a problem.



The remaining third of the herd has been brought forward from autumn calving to now calve outdoors in late summer (August and September). John explains that this decision was made for several management reasons, including for the better weather, stronger and more uniform calves when it comes to housing, and also allowing the majority of cows to be put to the bull, aiming to see over 60% of cows served before being housed for the winter. Across both groups, heifers are calved at between two and two and a half years old, John comments

"I accept that two-year-old calving is seen as the industry target, the realities though are slightly different!" While all cows are wintered inside, some of the heifers are wintered on kale or fodder beet, due to the fact that the herd has grown significantly over the last five years and outgrown the available cattle accommodation.

The herd at Glenkiln farms has been a member of the Premium Cattle Health Scheme since 2012. When asked about the reasons for joining the scheme, John responded: *"To manage Johne's Disease. You'll note I say manage, eradicating Johne's would be the long-term goal, however with a better understanding of the disease now I know that is a long-term goal, so managing a continued reduction in prevalence is our current aim."*

"Considering the workload and cost of testing 900 animals per year, it's also worth adding our reasons for continuing with the scheme. We're aiming to manage Johne's in an expanding closed herd. After all the testing we have done we're currently at an incidence of less than one percent. We're always looking to reduce that but in reality, if we can maintain that level of incidence, I think that will be an achievement in itself, knowing how difficult a disease it is to both determine and eradicate."

"The major benefit of regular testing is detecting Johnes in an animal before it is showing clinical signs, allowing us to cash it before it becomes a cost and also detecting potential replacement heifers from positive dams".

John also emphasised the importance of the relationship and continual discussion with their vet when it comes to other aspects of herd health.

"No two years are the same and with continual developments in vaccines it's important to annually re-evaluate our programmes. We had several years of struggling with pneumonia among our autumn calves, but finally found a vaccine programme that has made a significant improvement, alongside investment to upgrade their winter housing." The breeding cows are vaccinated for Leptospirosis, having faced a previous challenge from the disease, a relatively cheap vaccine that has achieved *"what it says on the tin!"*

Looking to the future, John and his team aim is to continue to grow the herd and reach a position to be able to sell surplus breeding heifers once they've reached their goal, as well as eventually reaching risk level one for Johne's Disease.

PCHS Membership Update

The membership figures below show the overall membership of PCHS, as well as the number of members with accreditation for each disease. These figures are correct as of September 2024.

Country	Members
Scotland	1597
England	1416
Wales	383
Northern Ireland	29
Republic of Ireland	5
Total	3430



Disease	Number of Members with Accreditation
BVD	1552
IBR	364
Leptospirosis	314

Disease	RL1	RL2	RL3	RL4	RL5
Johne's Disease	1030	477	228	143	64
Neospora	63	90	33	27	1



Changes to the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme – Achieving the 410 Day Calving Interval

The Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme (SSBSS, also referred to as the ‘calf scheme’), commenced in 2015. From 2025 changes to the scheme mean that calves will need to be born from a dam with a calving interval of 410 days or less.

Heifer’s calves will be eligible, providing they have met the other scheme conditions (being 75% beef bred, born and stayed on the holding for 30 days) as no calving interval is established.

The 410-day calving interval condition has been added to the scheme to improve suckler herd productivity while contributing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Factors which affect calving interval include

cow body condition, bull fertility, incidence of difficult calvings, herd health and management of replacements. There are several steps farmers can take to reduce calving intervals and achieve the 410-day interval set by the SSBSS.

Managing Cow Condition & Nutrition

- Poor condition is a major cause of infertility. Body condition score (BCS) cows throughout the year, especially at calving and aim for BCS



2.5 – 3. Thin cows have longer anoestrus (the period after calving before cycling resumes) and take longer to get back in calf.

- Where possible manage thin cows and second calvers separately.
- Ensure homegrown forages are analysed and review cow rations with a nutritionist, to ensure energy requirements are being met. Energy can be a limiting factor in reproductive performance.
- Ensure mineral and trace element requirements are being met.

Maintain a Healthy Herd

- Alongside your vet prepare a herd health plan including a vaccination and quarantine protocol for bought in stock.
- When purchasing animals give preference to those from accredited herds / herds with a higher health status.
- Infectious diseases including BVD, Lepto, Campylobacter and Johne's disease reduce bull fertility and a cow's ability to conceive. These diseases also increase the risk of abortions and stillbirths.

Bull Fertility

- 1 in 5 bulls are found to be sub-fertile, therefore it is important that all bulls have an annual pre-breeding examination 6 – 8 weeks before the start of the breeding season. This should include a physical examination, examination and assessment of the reproductive organs and semen collection and assessment.
- Irrespective of the age of the bull, it is important to monitor bull performance during the breeding period checking for lameness or injury to his penis. Make sure that cows are holding to service, to reduce the risk of experiencing losses from bull infertility.
- Allow newly purchased bulls time to settle and allow time for a gradual diet transition. Sudden changes in diet can affect semen quality and production.

Avoid Difficult Calvings

- Difficult calvings increase calf losses and reduce fertility. Overfat or thin cows at calving increase the risk of calving difficulties. Cows which are too fat have an increased risk of a difficult calving due to more fat in the birth canal while cows that are too thin produce less colostrum.
- Use EBV's when selecting bulls, looking for those with a shorter gestation length, lighter birth weights and positive calving ease both maternal and direct.
- Make a note of which cows run with each bull to identify bulls which have repeat assisted or difficult calvings.

George Gauley: Agricultural Consultant



I am delighted to have recently taken up the post of SRUC Agricultural Consultant (England). Based in South Yorkshire I am well placed to provide research based independent Agricultural advice to farmers across the country.

I have worked as an Agricultural Consultant with SRUC for the last 9 years (Previously based in the Scottish Borders working with mixed farms). I specialise in livestock rationing, crop & grass nutrition (FACTS qualified), preparing financial budgets and assisting farmers in all types of grant applications (including SFI & carbon audits).

I love working with SRUC. Our advice is evidence based and I am backed up by a whole team of specialists, with knowledge of all areas of Agriculture.

My roots stem from Northern Ireland, where I grew up on a beef and sheep farm, before leaving to study agriculture at Newcastle University. After finishing university, I was lucky enough to spend a few years working on farms across East Anglia, New Zealand and Australia.

Contact: [07760990821](tel:07760990821) or george.gauley@sac.co.uk

Management of Heifer Replacements

- Correct management of bulling heifers is key to achieving good herd fertility. Ensure that breeding replacements reach target weights for bulling. Heifers should be 65% of their mature weight.
- Select for maternal characteristics. Heifers born earlier in the calving period are likely to be heavier at bulling and more fertile.
- Aim for a heifer mating period of six weeks. A compact mating period will lead to compact calving as cows
- Give first and second calvers preferential treatment (especially if calving at 2 years of age) as these heifers have a higher energy demand due to raising a calf, still growing and trying to get back in calf.



Sarah Balfour
SAC Consulting

BVD Ear Tags for BVD Tissue Testing

The calf virus test can sometimes be used as an alternative to the BVD Accreditation Scheme Check Test or as a management tool alongside the Check Test (see CHECS Rules 2:4).

What lab tests does SRUC Veterinary Services use and why?

We prefer to use PCR testing for the detection of BVD virus in ear tissue samples. PCR is an 'extremely sensitive method' as it works by amplifying tiny amounts of the target virus genetic material, enabling detection of even very low virus levels. Because PCR is such a sensitive method, samples can be pooled together for testing.

At SRUC, samples are 'tested in pools of 10' which speeds up testing while also reducing the cost.

PCR is also the most reliable method for BVD detection as, unlike ELISA test methods, it is unaffected by the presence of maternal antibodies in samples from young calves.

Caisley and Shearwell BVD Tissue Tags are currently tested by PCR.

We also use the ELISA test for other types of tags

In cases where:

- we are sent tags with liquid preservative which isn't suitable for PCR testing
- we are sent DNA tags (pink) when we need BVD tags (white)
- we receive a general SRUC submission form with the tags
- we receive tags from other companies where we are not set up for PCR testing



Prices will range from £3.50 – £5.94 depending on the type of test and the type of tag as some tags are opened by a robot and some tags are opened manually. If you are in any doubt about what tags to use, please contact our team at St Boswells. We appreciate that some members will have a preferred tag or will have bought in bulk. In some cases you will be charged for the testing directly and in others you will purchase the tag with the test already paid for.

- How long after tagging should I send in my BVD tissue tags?

Within two weeks

- What happens if I use another lab for testing?

We charge for our time spent on administration and uploading your results.

Useful links

England: [Bovine Viral Diarrhoea \(BVD\) | AHDB](#) (update on BVDfree)

Wales: [Home | Gwaredu BVD – Animal Health Welfare Wales \(ahww.cymru\)](#) or

[Welsh Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Eradication Scheme: guidance \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

Scotland: [Mandatory annual screening – Scottish BVD Eradication Scheme: guidance – gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)



Practical Buying Guide for Commercial Beef Farmers

We provide the following advice to new PCHS members, or commercial beef farmers who are purchasing accredited animals without the intention to gain accreditation for their herd.

As a member of PCHS, the information may well be a useful reminder of best practice when purchasing animals, as well as being important to consider for the other diseases you may not have accreditation for (for example if you are accredited for BVD and Johne's Disease only). It may also be something that you wish to pass on to non-accredited breeders when they are purchasing accredited animals from you.

Buying replacements can be a risky business, a healthy-looking animal may be carrying disease. Don't be afraid to ask direct questions about an animal's health status. One wrong assumption can lead to a crippling disease outbreak and devastate profits on your farm.

The table below gives a summary of recommendations for best practice when purchasing replacement animals. It is also important to consider what diseases might be present in your own herd too!

Best practice:

- Buy replacements (including bulls) from CHECS accredited herds
- Check herd status of PCHS members at www.cattlehealth.co.uk or contact the health schemes team at St Boswells

Most members have given permission for us to display their information and you can select by area and breed as well as disease – BVD, IBR, Lepto, Neospora and Johne's Disease.

- If you are given a certificate of accredited status check that the herd is within the testing date to see if CHECS accredited status is still valid
- Isolate purchased stock on arrival for at least one month. Purchasing animals through markets and transportation poses a potential disease risk so quarantine and test animals before they join the herd (see table below)
- If you are buying in pregnant animals quarantine them on arrival and tissue tag the calf for BVD as soon as it is born before mixing with the rest of the herd.
- Try to buy accredited high health status bulls otherwise quarantine and test before introducing to the herd – after all they represent 50% of your herd!

Disease	Quarantine Recommendations
BVD	Quarantine for at least 28 days, Test animals' antibodies and virus don't use bulls for a period of 10 weeks after entry into quarantine (be aware of vaccination status)
Johne's Disease	If possible, no added animals as high risk! Blood and Faeces tests irrespective of age
IBR	Sample and test at least 28 days after entry
Leptospirosis	Sample and test at least 28 days after entry
Neospora	Sample and test for antibody on farm of origin

Purchasing CHECS Accredited Animals and maintaining their status

You must decide if you wish to accredit all stock on the holding or keep newly acquired stock separated. If you keep two separate herds, you must be sure to follow biosecurity guidelines otherwise the accredited herd will lose its status. Keep hold of your certification and contact the PCHS Team at St Boswell's who will be able to guide you and your vet on next steps to registering your herd.

Podcast

Have you heard the **On The Hoof** podcast?

Follow the link for all our past episodes and subscribe to keep up with new ones as they come out! www.bit.ly/SRUC_podcast



Events

We will be exhibiting at the following events in 2025, please let us know if you are organising an event where SRUC Veterinary Services could be represented by either a trade stand or a speaker.

NSA Welsh Sheep	21st May	Brecon, Powys
NSA North Sheep	4th June	Penrith, Cumbria
NSA Highland Sheep	11th June	Ardgay, Highland
Royal Highland Show	19th – 22nd June	Ingliston, Edinburgh
NSA Sheep South West	25th June	East Knowstone, Devon
Great Yorkshire Show	8th – 11th July	Harrogate, North Yorkshire
Royal Welsh Show	21st – 24th July	Builth Wells, Powys

Meet the Team



Alison Braddock
Marketing and Business
Development Manager
BSc (Hons)



David Wilson
Veterinary Manager,
SRUC Health Schemes
MA BVMS DSHP MRCVS



Colin Mason
Veterinary Centre
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John Scholefield
Marketing and Business
Development
Officer, BA



Helen Carty
Veterinary Centre
Manager, BVM&S, Cert
AVP (cattle), MRCVS



Health Schemes office team, based in St Boswells:
(from left to right) Louise, Charlotte, Susan, Kirsty,
Lisa, Louise, Charlotte, Hilary, Rachel.