



Your ruminants update

From RSPCA Assured

Welcome to the Spring/Summer newsletter



in Telford.

As I write this I am still very much desk and housebound, but things are now progressing so rapidly who knows where I will be as you read this! I have to be honest it is lovely not to be travelling so much or living out of a suitcase, and my dog and cats are delighted, but I am missing getting out and about meeting everyone. Fingers crossed I will see some of you at NSA Sheep 2020 being held at The Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire on the 19th October, and the UK Dairy Day on the 16th September

The farming community is a resilient bunch, and coping with the unexpected is commonplace. Covid-19 following so shortly after Brexit has thrown more challenges personally and professionally than ever before. But we continue to bend, not break, and show determination, resolve, compassion, and above all else, kindness.

We are finally recognising our heroes. Not just the incredible NHS, but the essential workers which of course includes farmers. It's that spirit of 'getting on with it' whilst supporting others and going above and beyond, that our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be told about in their history lessons, and we, of course, will never forget.

In this newsletter, you will hopefully find some interesting articles and inspiring stories that make me, and I hope you, feel so proud to be part of the farming community. Enjoy reading, and please keep safe, keep well and keep going.

Joe Bailey, Head of Farming

Assessments Continue with our Members' Help

By Dorian Cross, Field Assessment Manager

At a time where we are all facing a shared anxiety and disruption to our working environment, it remains extremely important that RSPCA Assured continues to work with, and on behalf of, our members.

Brand security and scheme integrity remain essential to secure the premiums our members benefit from.

By conducting 'virtual' assessments in a remote and safe environment, we are assuring both retailers and consumers that higher farm animal welfare is being maintained by our members under these difficult circumstances.

Whilst the technology involved in a 'virtual' assessment is new to some and not easy for everyone to use, the results are proving very impressive. We appreciate this achievement has only been made possible with the full cooperation of our members for which RSPCA Assured is truly grateful.

Importantly, our assessment contingency plan that we have put in place provides the same level of measuring compliance with the RSPCA welfare standards for farmed animals, comparable to that of a conventional site visit assessment.

This approach has successfully provided the means to continue to validate certification for our members, gaining the approval of our certification body NSF. However, this approach remains a temporary arrangement, until such time our assessors can return to visiting farms again, as nothing fully replaces talking with members in person and seeing their animals up close.

You will have seen that this week we announced a cautious phased return to on-site assessments. Please click [here](#) for the most up to date information.

Desktop Assessment Tips

By Julie Taylor, Senior Assessor

As we are all getting used to the new temporary virtual assessments, we have put together some tips here to make them run smoothly and successfully.

- The assessor may ask you to conduct a video test to establish whether a good signal can be received, the best method to carry out the assessments, and so you can familiarise yourself with the relevant app that will be used (Google Meet, WhatsApp etc)
- You may find that earphones are useful in noisier livestock areas to help you hear one another
- Prior to your desktop assessment, please make sure the mobile device you'll be using is fully charged and that you have all the documents to hand that the assessor pre-advised you about.
- Photographs and electronic versions of documents may be submitted in advance if you wish, however this is not compulsory as it should be possible to examine documents and records via the live video link at the assessment
- Any files you choose to submit in advance will be stored securely and removed permanently as soon as your assessment is over

Thank you, and if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to [get in touch](#).



Clarification on New Plastics, Soy and Palm Oil Policies

By Rebecca Lenik, PR Manager

We recently introduced new policies for plastics, soy and palm oil.

To clarify, these new policies relate **only** to packaged products and **not** to the use of soy or palm oil in animal feed, as we appreciate the logistics involved.

They are a requirement of the logo use guidelines used by retailers and processor/packers only and not producer members.

As such, they are not included in the RSPCA welfare standards. However, we do make a **recommendation only** that producers consider the use of soy and palm oil in their animal feed as it's becoming increasingly important to consumers.

You can find out more [here](#).

New Standards

By John Avizienious, Scientific & Tech Advisory Section Manager

It has been a busy year so far on the ruminants front, with [new standards for Beef Cattle](#) being produced in February, Sheep in June and Dairy Cattle were due in June as well, but have now been delayed because of the Covid-19 situation.

The [new sheep standards](#) were communicated to members via newsletter on 31 March. If you missed it, a few things to note are new standards relating to the use of pain relief for any procedure that is likely to cause pain to the animal during and or after the procedure,

and specifically, this will apply to both castration using a rubber ring and also to tail docking. The British Veterinary Association (BVA) also recommends that appropriate analgesia is used when performing these procedures.

If you have any queries, please [contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department](#).

Positive Welfare Consultation

By guest contributor Lizzie Rowe, Bristol University

Assessment of animal welfare mainly focuses on protecting animals from negative experiences, but giving animals a good quality of life means allowing them to enjoy positive experiences too.

We, a team of researchers at the University of Bristol and the Royal Agricultural University, have put together frameworks for assessing the extent to which farm animals have opportunities for positive experiences in their lives. These frameworks are based on scientific research.

We are now eager to collaborate with farmers to further develop the frameworks. As such, **we are seeking farmers who would be willing to have a one-hour (approximately) call with a member of our research team**, to go through the assessment based on their farm, and to answer questions on the contents of the framework.

With your knowledge and expertise, you can help us make sure the frameworks are valid, relevant and practical. We are specifically seeking pig, broiler chicken, and beef cattle farmers. We will send you the framework in advance so that you can gather your thoughts on it before the call.

We are in consultation with Defra about using the frameworks to inform monetary rewards for protecting and improving animal welfare; thus this is an opportunity for you to help develop potential future policy on animal welfare.

If you are interested, please email [me](#). Thank you and we hope to hear from you.

Sheep Tail-docking and Castration

By Andrea Stanley, Senior Assessor

As a member and a senior assessor of RSPCA Assured I am looking forward to implementing the new sheep standards this year. There are a number of changes, all with the aim of improving welfare and maintaining the highest standards.

I know that some standards will present more of a challenge than others and I have already spoken to a number of our producers regarding the changes. Many have been very accepting of the changes but have still needed some reassurance in how to meet

these standards, in particular to the provision of painkillers for tail docking and castration. With this in mind, I thought I would share my experiences.

As a sheep producer for a number of years, I now don't tail-dock my Suffolk X Colbreds, and I am happy to say there have been no negative effects on welfare. There is concern around fly strike but if the sheep are clean around the hindquarters, there should be no issues with flystrike. Keeping sheep clean by ensuring timely worm control and dagging out where appropriate, means that management is better controlled.

I dag my ewes pre-tupping and trim up if necessary at lambing which keeps them tidy until I am ready to shear come May or June. I then apply a fly prevention product to keep them protected over the summer months.

Long tails have proven not to be an issue to abattoirs and I take pride with my fat lambs to ensure they are dagged out and clean prior to presentation for slaughter.

Like most producers, I do not have the available area to split ram lambs and ewe lambs so I do need to castrate. I have been providing pain relief for castration for a number of years and the method I use is the rubber ring method.

When I had a small number of sheep I had the luxury of injecting the lambs with a subcutaneous painkiller about 30 minutes prior to applying the ring to enable the painkiller to kick in. As my numbers have increased I have found that applying the rubber ring and giving the painkiller at the same time has been more efficient with no more discernible negative effect on the lamb.

I have noticed that lambs are in far less discomfort since using the painkiller and are up drinking and frolicking as lambs do much quicker than without it.

In reply to some concern that there is no licensed product for sheep, I have yet to use a vet that has refused my request for pain relief for this procedure.

I am hoping this has helped to provide some answers in meeting the new standard and give some confidence that it is practically feasible to carry out with a positive impact for your lambs.

LEAF *Online* Farm Sunday!

With farm visits on hold and LEAF Open Farm Sunday postponed to September, the organisers, [Linking Environment And Farming](#), have announced they are running their very first [LEAF Online Farm Sunday](#).

On Sunday 7th June, farmers from Aberdeenshire to Jersey, and across all farming sectors, will be taking over the LEAF Open Farm Sunday (LOFS) [Facebook channel](#) and hosting virtual tours showcasing what is involved in producing food, enhancing the environment, and some of the amazing science and technology involved. This virtual format allows for live interaction and questions from the public. Find out more [here](#).

If you and/or your farm would like to get involved, don't forget to use the #rspcaassured hashtag too and show how important higher animal welfare is on your farm!

Nuffield Webinar: Stay Calm through Covid

By Guest Editor at Nuffield

There seem to be two clear camps of people I've come across in Lockdown, says Holly Beckett – those who are extremely stressed and distressed and feel a total lack of control over the situation and the other group - like me – is loving lockdown! There is a sense of calm and a more relaxed pace of life and ultimately, real change comes from crisis and the opportunities we have to really change the reality of British agriculture have not been so open for decades – what an exciting time!



Holly, Director of Focussed Farmers set up in 2017 to introduce mindfulness to agriculture, has recently run an online series of workshops entitled *Stay Calm through Covid* which began with an interview with three farmers who have been working with Holly through Focussed Farmers to bring mindfulness, coupled with goal setting techniques, into their daily lives for a number of years.

The title of the interview was *Crisis is a State of Mind* and the farmers, in turn, explained what mindfulness, increased through the mental exercise of meditation had brought to them, their family and their farming business and the stories were a far cry from a crisis.

Rob Bebbington, arable farmer from Shropshire explained how at the time of coming across Focussed Farmers he felt like he was treading water and not as focussed as he could be. He noticed a difference straight away in that he began to be able to ignore the noise, had a much clearer mind through the day that allowed him to focus on what was really important to him to get done.

Dan Burdett, dairy farmer and 2019 Nuffield Scholar was not only facing the trials and tribulations of a global lockdown but has also just been struck by an outbreak of TB. Dan had taken interest in the programme as he felt his mind was cluttered a lot of the time and he was always starting lots of jobs but seemed to not finish them. He has found that nowadays he can notice quickly if the noise in his head is getting too loud or too busy and he knows how effective it is to just stop and take a mindful moment, go for a walk and just focus on one thing. He now focusses only on the things he can change and explained how the tools he gained from Focussed Farmers have been really helpful to keep him on an even keel over the past few months, whatever he is faced with.

Focussed Farmers is a mindfulness-based programme to develop focus, increase productivity and reduce stress, through self-leadership and mental training. The training and knowledge transfer is based heavily on recent research into neuroscience and cognitive psychology and Holly provides the whole of the agricultural community with an

opportunity to learn a bit more about this through the workshop series; which you can [view online](#).

Find out more about Focussed Farmers [here](#) or follow [@FocussedFarmers](#) on Twitter.

Helpful Wellbeing Links

If you need help or have queries regarding desktop assessments or anything else related to RSPCA Assured, please do contact us. We have also shared some helpful links on wellbeing during the Covid-19 crisis below:

[That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief](#)

[Caring for employee mental health: a coronavirus guide](#)

[The Adaptive Challenge of COVID-19](#)

[Ten things I've learned in a month of working from home](#)

[Managing remote teams so BAU still happens as normal](#)

Best wishes,

RSPCA Assured

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