

August 2026 Newsletter



Grazing beef and sheep: Unveiling the vital role of trace elements and minerals

Hot, dry weather lowers grass quality for ruminants by stunting plant growth and reducing vital trace elements. As dry soil slows down the work of soil helpers, and roots struggle to pull up minerals.

*Hot weather may have impacted your forage quality.
But why are these minerals so important?*

Trace Element	Main Function	Deficiency Effects
Zinc (Zn)	The guardian of immune health	Poor immunity = increased disease risk. Crusty skin problems (parakeratosis), poor hoof health. Poor growth.
Copper (Cu)	The catalyst for growth and reproduction	Delayed puberty and reduced fertility . Faded coat colour e.g. thinning hair around the eyes. Poor growth , and scour. In severe cases, anaemia, stiff joints, and sudden heart failure. SHEEP: Copper toxicity is fatal. Only supplement if copper deficiency is diagnosed!
Selenium (Se)	A powerful antioxidant	White muscle disease (stiff, weak calves and lambs). Poor immunity = increased disease risk. Reduced fertility.
Iodine (I)	Core building block for thyroid hormones	Poor growth , reduced fertility, stillbirths, thyroid problems.
Manganese (Mn)	Cofactor for skeletal growth enzymes	Reduced fertility (return to heat, stillbirths) and skeletal deformities in newborn calves/ lambs. Poor growth rates.
Cobalt (Co)	Core building block for Vitamin B12	Loss of appetite, poor growth rates, pale skin and eyes (anaemia), lower milk yield.

What can we do about it?

- A simple blood test performed on at least 6 animals can help to determine herd/flock level deficiencies.
- Liver samples taken at post-mortem or the abattoir can indicate Copper, Manganese, Cobalt & Selenium levels.
- Grass, soil and silage analysis allows you to predict and prevent deficiencies.

Signs can be subtle, yet impact productivity. Correction of deficiencies can make noticeable improvements to the health of your animals. There are a number of ways we can offer supplementation if required including boluses which typically last 6 months, injections and in feed supplementation. Speak to one of our vets for more guidance or the office to book in your blood sampling.

Increased risk of toxic plant ingestion!

With the ongoing hot weather there is an increased risk of animals ingesting toxic plants. Livestock rarely choose poisonous plants when good forage is available, however when pastures dry up or become overgrazed, animals change their normal grazing behaviour. Hungry animals become less selective and graze plants they'd normally ignore or they may graze areas they wouldn't normally such as water ditches. Palatability of some toxic plants can change due to drought stress or when they are cut and included in forage, making them smell sweeter or appear more lush than dry grass. This combination means that plants livestock have avoided for years can suddenly become dangerous.

Some common plants include: Ragwort, Yew, Hemlock, Foxgloves, Bracken and Laburnum (this is not a complete list!)

What can you do?

Providing supplementary feeding, fencing off areas known to contain toxic plants or removing toxic plants (if safe to do so!). Keep an eye out for any dumped garden waste and monitor grazing behaviour.



Ram MOT and Breeding Soundness Exams

An infertile or sub-fertile ram can really affect farm profitability by causing a reduced lamb crop or increased lambing period. It's thought between 10-30% of rams can be either infertile or sub-fertile. Performing a ram MOT 6-12 weeks prior to tupping can help to identify problems in advance and leaves enough time for any problems to be corrected/treated or a new ram to be sourced.

MOT Checklist

- General check over –
 - o Loss of wool which may be due to scab or lice.
 - o Any sores over the brisket which may be painful if wearing a raddle.
 - o Any abscesses under the jaw and around the neck which may be caused by caseous lymphadenitis (CLA).
 - o Ensure he has no wounds from fighting or cracks/damage to his horns.
 - o Check both eyes appear normal.
- BCS (Body Condition Score) – aim for 3.5-4 out of 5. You want them fit not fat. Rams can lose up to 15% of their BCS during the mating period so if too thin, they may not be able to serve all the ewes. Too fat then they have a reduced libido and excess fat in the scrotum leads to decreased fertility. Additional feed may be required to increase their BCS if it's low. Ideally 12.5MJ ME/kg DM, for the 6 weeks prior to tupping, and avoid high levels of magnesium.



- Teeth – Check the mouth for under or overshot jaws, the teeth for any tooth loss, gaps or molar abscesses. Also listen for any 'snoring' signs that may be a sign of laryngeal thickening.
- Feet – Check locomotion, legs and feet. Ensure there are no abnormalities in the limbs and that there is no scald, footrot or COOD.
- Testicles – Check that both the testicles are the same size and not shrunken or enlarged. They should feel firm (like a tensed bicep) and be freely moving within the scrotum. Check the prepuce and penis for any swelling, discharge, blood, ulcers, orf, growths or adhesions
- Treatments – Ensure vaccinations are up to date (in advance of the breeding period) as well as parasite treatments if needed.

Ram Breeding Soundness Exam:

The Breeding Soundness exam is carried out by one of the vets and includes the following:

- Full clinical exam
- Examination of the reproductive tract
- Electro-ejaculation and analysis of a semen sample, looking at gross motility, progressive motility and morphology of semen. Please be aware that some rams will not always produce a semen sample despite being clinically normal, there are some steps that can aid in increasing the success of collecting a sample which can be discussed with one of our vets.

If you find any problems while carrying out a ram MOT or if you'd like to book a ram breeding soundness exam, please give the office a call.

Cross Counties Farm Vets 01455 710935

Welford Branch: Elkington Lodge, Elkington Road, Welford, Northampton, NN6 6HE.

Lutterworth Branch: Elizabethan House, Lutterworth, Leicestershire, LE17 4NJ.

Broughton Astley Branch: 12 Swannington Road, Broughton Astley, Leicestershire, LE9 6TU.

Email: office@ccfarmvets.co.uk Website: www.ccfarmvets.co.uk

Facebook/Instagram: Cross Counties Farm Vets

Broughton Vet Group Ltd trading as Cross Counties Farm Vets. Company number 9243007 registered in England & Wales. Registered office: Spitfire House, Aviator Court, York, YO30 4UZ