



## Animal Health and Welfare Pathway: Supporting Health and Efficiency on Farm

Economic pressures remain high across UK agriculture, particularly in the dairy sector. Rising costs and changes following reform of the Common Agricultural Policy have shifted support away from traditional subsidies toward targeted grants. While these schemes may provide less direct income, they aim to support improvements in productivity, animal health and long-term farm sustainability.

One such initiative is the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, two recent examples show how the scheme can deliver measurable improvements in both beef and dairy systems.

### Case Study: Developing a Structured Suckler Herd

Court Farm has used funding through the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway over the past four years to develop a nucleus suckler herd while strengthening the fundamentals of its cow-calf system.

The farmer Mr Powell's key goal was to move away from year-round calving and store cattle production towards a tighter block calving system. Since introducing artificial insemination in 2023, the herd has made significant progress. Today more than 70% of cows calve within the first three weeks of a strict nine-week calving block.

This tighter calving pattern has improved calf uniformity and performance at weaning while simplifying herd management. It has also helped the farm make better use of seasonal grazing, utilising spring grass growth efficiently while store cattle benefit from later-season herbal ley grazing.

Veterinary input has been led by Will Balhatchet, who carried out the synchronisation and AI programme. During a routine pre-calving assessment funded through the pathway, testing identified low iodine and suboptimal protein levels in the herd. Early supplementation was introduced, resulting in a strong calving season with healthy calves and cows in good condition. This has created a solid platform for the 2026 breeding period.



### Case Study: Tackling Mastitis in a Robotic Dairy Herd

The pathway has also supported improvements in udder health on a 220-cow Holstein Friesian herd milked using Lely A3 units.

Although clinical mastitis levels were relatively low, bulk somatic cell counts had remained persistently high. The issue worsened when a shortage of sawdust bedding forced the farm to use alternative bedding with inconsistent quality, leading to a surge in clinical mastitis and the development of chronically infected cows. The herd's three-month rolling averages showed a bulk SCC of 238,000 cells/ml, a clinical mastitis rate of 29 cases per 100 cows per year, and 14.1% of cows classified as chronically infected.

A pathway mastitis review identified several environmental risk factors including slurry build-up around robots, limited water space, pressure on feed areas and insufficient cubicle hygiene.

Management changes were introduced, including scraping passages twice daily, improving cubicle cleaning and re-bedding routines, increasing water trough space and making better use of loafing areas to reduce stocking pressure. Robot hygiene and maintenance protocols were also strengthened.

Six months later the herd data showed clear improvement. Bulk SCC had fallen to 141,000 cells/ml, clinical mastitis had dropped to 18 cases per 100 cows per year, and chronically infected cows had reduced to 5.7%. The improvements reflect both reduced new infections and the gradual removal of chronically infected animals.



## How the Pathway Works

The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway begins with a funded Annual Health and Welfare Review carried out by a vet. During this visit, herd or flock health, disease risks and management practices are assessed and samples are taken. The farmer and vet then identify priority areas where improvements could benefit welfare, productivity and long-term farm performance. Additional funding may then be available for testing, monitoring or targeted health interventions.



## How to Apply

Farmers can apply for the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway through the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs website. The process begins by obtaining an agreement number and applying for an Annual Health and Welfare Review through the Rural Payments Service portal. Farmers will need their Rural Payments Service customer reference number (CRN) and password to sign in and complete the application. Once approved, a veterinary visit can be arranged to carry out the funded review.

## Funding Available

Funding varies by enterprise. Sheep flocks with more than 21 animals can receive £557 for the initial review and up to £923 for follow-up actions. Dairy farms receive £436 for the review, with additional funding of up to £1,714 if Bovine Viral Diarrhoea is detected, or £215 if negative. Beef herds receive £522 initially and up to £837 if BVD is present, or £215 if negative. The funding supports early disease detection and proactive herd health management.



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