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# TOMORROW'S FARMER



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YOUR NEWSLETTER FROM CREDITON MILLING COMPANY

## Are your cows trending?

Dairy farms generate huge amounts of data—some find it invaluable, others struggle to link it to daily decisions. And let's be honest: a graph on its own never made anything better. But spotting trends and setting trigger points for review, that's where the value lies.



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RUMINANT DEVELOPMENT

lifetime milk, better fertility, and lower rearing costs. The 24-month target is ideal, but the main focus should be your own farm's trend. Where are the bottlenecks? What's slowing things down? A fresh set of eyes from your advisory team can highlight practical fixes.

### Mobility and Lameness Costs

Most farms now get regular mobility data to meet Red Tractor standards—but are we using it? In 2023, a lame cow (score 2 or 3) cost an estimated £3.30 per day. That might sound vague, but the knock-on effects on yield, fertility, and culling are very real.

Mobility data shows whether things are improving or not. Foot trimming records add the "why."

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DAIRY

Keep it simple. One of my college lecturers was a firm believer in the KISS principle—Keep It Simple, Stupid. It's easy to drown in data, but unless the basics are right, the numbers won't fix anything. When trends start heading the wrong way, or key figures drift off track, it's time to step back and reassess the fundamentals.

### Calf Growth Rates

Why measure calf growth? Because even small gains pay off. Research shows an extra 100g/day during pre-

weaning can mean 100kg more milk in a heifer's first lactation. Tracking growth tells you whether things are improving and helps judge if changes are working. Don't get bogged down chasing the "perfect" figure—watch the trend, and aim for progress.

**Short on time? Our Focus Team can take care of the measuring, monitoring, and planning so you can focus on the day-to-day.**

### Age at First Calving

Another key marker: age at first calving. Earlier calving means more

DAIRY

POULTRY

BEEF & SHEEP

FORAGE

## Are your cows trending? *continued from page 1*

Used together, they help focus time and money on cost-effective, trackable solutions that actually make a difference.

### Using On-Farm Data Effectively

With milk recording, software dashboards, and farm apps, most units are swimming in data. The challenge is knowing what to track, when to take action, and—most importantly—when to ignore the noise. A single figure on its own doesn't mean much. It's the direction of travel that matters.

Trends in somatic cell counts, conception rates, or service intervals can all flag up problems before they become costly. But only if you're

watching them closely—and with clear targets in mind.

### Team Up on the Numbers

Data is only useful when shared. The best results come when you and your trusted advisors review key figures together, spot patterns, and decide what needs adjusting. Knowing where the bottlenecks are—and proving that changes work—is how real progress is made.

### Want to make better use of your data?

Get in touch, we'll help you choose what to monitor, track the right trends, and make sure your figures work for you—not against you.



Of all the trace minerals likely to spark interest at a dairy nutrition meeting, chromium probably wasn't top of the list—until now.



DAIRY

After what feels like a lengthy wait, Availa® Cr, a chromium methionine product from Zinpro, is officially available in the UK. And it's not just another name on a spec sheet. This one's got solid backing and some practical benefits that make it worth a second look.

Chromium's headline act is its role in insulin sensitivity. That might sound more at home in a diabetes leaflet, but in dairy cows it means more efficient glucose use—and that translates to better energy management when it matters most, especially during early lactation. The result? Improved feed conversion and

# Availa® Chromium: The long wait is over

potentially more milk from the same ration. Not bad for a trace mineral.

Then there's stress—proper stress, not mild irritation. We're talking calving, transition periods, hot weather, and peak yield. These are the times when cows typically falter, with feed intakes dipping and immune defences dropping off. Supplementing with chromium has been shown to help animals stay on track by supporting hormone balance and immune response. In other words, fewer setbacks and a bit more consistency when it counts.

Where Availa® Cr stands out is in how well it's absorbed. Many conventional mineral supplements don't get taken up particularly well—what goes in one end often ends up spread across a field. But this organic form of chromium is much more bioavailable, meaning less waste and better value from every inclusion. For those aiming to cut nutrient losses and sharpen feed efficiency, that's a real plus.

At present, it's the only chromium feed additive authorised for use in the UK, and it's approved specifically for dairy cows. Regulatory authorities have signed off on both its safety



and its ability to improve milk yield when used correctly, so it's not just marketing spin. For producers looking to make marginal gains in productivity and resilience, this gives them something genuinely new to work with.

So whether you're looking to ease the stress of transition, fine-tune performance, or simply try something that wasn't available last year, Availa® Chromium has arrived—and not before time.



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# Supporting the Next Generation: apprenticeships in agriculture

**The CMC Question Time event in Exeter—an important and informative session. Among the many important discussions, the topic of recruitment and retaining farm staff particularly stood out, especially as it's something I've been involved with for over a decade through my work in agricultural apprenticeships.**

I'm Peter Reed, Lead Trainer for Agricultural Apprenticeships at STS (Skern Training and Skills). Over the years, I've seen a clear shift in who is coming into the industry and how employers are engaging with staff. Traditionally, most apprentices were from farming families, often working on their own or neighbouring farms. However, in the last five years—especially since COVID—there's been a rise in learners from non-farming backgrounds seeking a career in agriculture. Some may be drawn by the idea of a rural lifestyle, but many bring valuable perspectives and a fresh

approach that progressive employers have embraced.

In my role, I support employers in finding and developing the right apprentice. It's not always a quick win—apprentices need time, support, and consistent guidance to become valuable team members. Matching the learner to the right business is key. We currently support around 50 employers across the South West, and I continue to be struck by the diversity of farming operations—and of how they look after their staff.

Something as simple as where a learner eats lunch can make a big difference to motivation. I've seen everything from apprentices eating alone in the corner of a workshop to those who have access to a dedicated break room with a kettle, microwave, dry space, and even performance boards showing DLWG averages, SCC, and weekly targets. These touches help create a sense of inclusion and purpose, and they often improve communication and teamwork.

We offer a progression of apprenticeships to suit a range of farm roles:

- **Level 2 General Farm Worker**  
– Covers core practical tasks: livestock feeding, bedding, handling, machinery use, health and safety, biosecurity and record keeping.
- **Level 3 Livestock Unit Technician**  
– A more technical qualification with a focus on farm performance, data interpretation and a deeper understanding of livestock systems.



- **Level 4 Assistant Farm Manager**  
– Supports learners involved in business-level management, covering everything from production planning through to sales and supply chains.

Since COVID, more employers are also investing in upskilling their current staff. This not only boosts motivation and retention, but also brings fresh thinking into the business. Many of our learners progress through multiple levels, often staying with the same employer—which is testament to the strength of those working relationships.

STS is proud of our 100% achievement rate, and all apprenticeships are currently fully funded for learners under 22, with 95% funding for those over 22. Employers may also be eligible for a £1,000 incentive grant.

If you'd like to find out more, call 01237 809 469, email [enquiries@skerntrainingandskills.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@skerntrainingandskills.co.uk) or attend one of our upcoming information events for employers and apprentices.

**PETER REED SKERN**  
LEAD TRAINER FOR  
AGRICULTURAL APPRENTICESHIPS,  
STS (SKERN TRAINING & SKILLS)





# Ventilation, dust, and immune pressure:

## April's airborne risks for free-range layers

April can be a testing time for free-range flocks. As temperatures start to rise and ventilation increases, many producers find themselves juggling air quality, dust levels, and immune challenges—all while trying to maintain strong egg output and shell quality. For systems where birds have outdoor access and a longer lay cycle, managing respiratory health at this stage of the year is critical.



### POULTRY

As ventilation settings shift from winter minimums to transitional airflow, litter tends to dry out, dust levels rise, and airborne irritants become more prevalent. Dust particles carry a cocktail of threats—ammonia, bacteria, fungal spores, and endotoxins—that can irritate the respiratory tract and compromise mucosal defences. In free-range systems, where birds are exposed to wider pathogen pressures and variable weather, these airborne risks can quietly erode flock performance.

Mild respiratory irritation may not always present clearly, but the effects are visible in shell quality, feed conversion, and persistency of lay.

Once inflammation sets in, nutrient absorption can suffer and shell deposition becomes less consistent. This is especially relevant in flocks already past peak, where even small dips in resilience can lead to higher seconds and rising mortality.

Ventilation is the starting point. Free-range houses often struggle with airflow uniformity, particularly where pop-holes introduce cold drafts or cause dead spots in the shed. Regular checks on in-house temperatures, airspeed, and humidity—alongside simple dust plate monitoring—can highlight issues before they escalate. Adjustments to inlet angles and fan run times may be needed

as the weather turns warmer, especially on still days.

From a nutritional standpoint, support for the respiratory and immune systems can help mitigate airborne stress. Vitamins A and E are central to mucosal health, while selenium and zinc support immune responsiveness. Levels should be reviewed during periods of increased dust or mild respiratory challenge, as birds' requirements often exceed baseline inclusions when under pressure.

Managing litter condition is just as important. Excessively dry litter increases dust load, while wet patches around drinkers raise ammonia levels. Small adjustments in water pressure, sodium content, or feed texture can help stabilise litter quality without impacting intake.

Heading into spring, performance targets naturally take centre stage—but air quality shouldn't be an afterthought. For free-range flocks to stay productive and resilient through the season, the air they breathe matters just as much as what they eat.



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