

Providing high quality input and advice in sustainable livestock production is at the heart of our business at RAFT Solutions.

As a sister company to the Bishopton Veterinary Group, RAFT Solutions Ltd was established in 2010 to look for innovative research, advanced breeding and training solutions to the food sustainability questions our farmers, vets and industry colleagues ask. Our team of industry leading vets, technicians and project managers work across the industry to develop innovative research and bring high quality, practical input and advice to help the livestock industry.

A purpose-built cattle breeding facility is now fully operational just outside Ripon, North Yorkshire for the RAFT Solutions team, enabling them to offer residential services to cattle from across the UK. The project has been nearly five years in the making and establishing the breeding unit was prompted by the ambition to further develop the advanced breeding services at RAFT, including Ovum Pick Up/In-Vitro Production (OPU/IVP) and embryo collection and transfer. These advanced breeding techniques enable farmers to multiply the number of offspring / progeny born from animals they deem to be genetically better, a service that RAFT Solutions and Bishopton Vets team have offered on farm since the early 2000's.

As part of this new facility is the laboratory; here the processing of embryos is carried out as well as being the nerve centre of SemenRate – the only independent UK-based laboratory testing bovine, porcine, equine and ovine semen.

Previously, tests have relied solely on microscopy and the human eye to assess whether bull semen is good enough to use. SemenRate can add objective assessment of motility, concentration and parts of the spermatozoa that cannot be assessed with standard microscopy.

Computer Assisted Semen Analysis (CASA) assesses the motility and concentration of a semen sample while Flow Cytometry (FC) takes advanced testing to another level, using coloured dyes and lasers to analyse accurately the molecular status of a sample. The combination of CASA and FC gives invaluable information regarding the quality of semen and its potential to perform in the field. All the parameters measured can have an influence on semen performance. These techniques saw the laboratory test a rapidly growing volume of submissions last year – many for their own farm clients but also for vets and farmers across the UK, in a quest to 'solve' fertility questions and conundrums within the UK dairy and beef herds.

RAFT are also at the heart of agricultural training; members of the RAFT team have developed and now deliver the highly successful and award-winning FarmSkills programs across the UK.

FarmSkills courses are designed to put the farmer first; finding out what you know now and what you'd like to know to improve your business. They are designed to provide practical, farm-based, small group training, delivered by vets and industry experts.

RAFT offer the full scope of farm training from core livestock skills through to bespoke training plans for progressive farms. Artificial Insemination training is delivered through their independent DEFRA approved licence and practical hoof-care and foot trimming to the level of NACFT licensed foot trimmer standard through the team of licensed foot trimmers.

A monthly on-line Farmskills Mastering Medicine Course is also available; a Red Tractor approved course which aims to increase trainees' knowledge on the various classes of medicines and how to use them safely and effectively on farm. The course also aims to increase trainees' understanding of the legislative requirements for on farm medicine use.

The team at RAFT look forward to welcoming visitors to this new breeding facility, either through attending a FarmSkills training course or, when restrictions allow, hosting an official opening to showcase the services and facilities that the breeding suite has to offer.

For any enquiries or further information please contact:-

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