



Down on the farm

In this month's farming column we meet **Emma Hillier**, who with her husband Jon runs a small farm in East Devon, breeding Devon Ruby beef cattle and British Lop pigs

A testing time

It's Monday morning; stage one always is. The second stage — the reading — is three clear days later, interval enough for your worry to climb. In our part of Devon the rates of TB are high, so we are tested every six months.

We get behind the cattle, encouraging them forward. "Hup! Hup! Ayyyup!" Flap an empty feed bag.

They're funnelled into a makeshift race, a channel of hurdles tied together with baler twine.

It's meant to be a single-file system but, like kids in a narrow corridor at lunchtime, they delight in getting themselves wedged, facing the wrong way.

The race leads them irreversibly towards the crush, a metal frame that contains the animal, preventing it from injuring itself or anyone else. Ours is oxide-red, resprayed in an effort to make it look newer than it is. Its wounds are welded each season, when we mutter about replacing it for something newer. We never do.

The time this might take cannot be told. Twenty minutes or two hours? Can't say which it will be until you sense what mood the herd are in.

Once the first one is in, it begins. *Snicksnip. Snicksnip.* Silver scissors clip bare two sections of conkerly hide on the neck. Using callipers, the thickness of the skin underneath each of the baldnesses is measured. Then, with a clicky pen double-snap, the vet injects 0.1ml of tuberculin into each site — 'bovine' into the top and 'avian' into the bottom. The eartag number is scribbled down.

Usually, the second and third go in okay. *Snicksnip. Snicksnip. Clickypen double-snap.* Eartag number. Gate open. Cow out.

Then, it's Petal and Audrey. The matriarchs. "Breathe in, ladies," I urge, as their titanic hips slide forward, almost pulling the crush with them. They stay politely still. They're good girls; their presence on the farm reassures me. "Not them," I plead silently. "Please don't take them."

As if you can make bargains about such things. It's always your best they have. ■

Find out more at:

www.farrantshayes.co.uk

[www.Twitter.com/farrantshayes](https://www.twitter.com/farrantshayes)

[www.Facebook.com/farrantshayesfarm](https://www.facebook.com/farrantshayesfarm)