



As mentioned in the main newsletter it certainly feels like we are well into Autumn now. Over the last few newsletters, we have talked about preparing for tugging and protecting your stock from seasonal diseases. This month is a follow on to help with successful tugging and looking at relevant parasite control to keep stock healthy at this critical time of year.

Worms

Remember that gut worms could still cause you a problem at this time especially if you are short of grazing and tightly stocked. The use of worm egg counts and targeted treatments is essential at this time of year to reduce worm burden while preventing resistance.



Haemonchus is a concern this time of year, as it is a blood sucking parasite severe disease can be seen with little warning, especially in younger animals that have less blood reserves. These worms are less common but can have severe impacts on farms where it is present. Signs to look out for and discuss with a vet if concerned are:

- acute onset fatigue
- pale mucous membranes (inside of eyelids and mouth) from anaemia (loss of blood)
- bottle jaw – fluid under jaw
- sudden death
- scour is usually not seen

Diagnosis is based upon symptoms, worm egg counts and post mortems on any dead stock in which the worm can be seen in the abomasum with the classic barbers pole appearance.

There are several different products than can be used if you have confirmed Haemonchus, which one will depend on individual farm circumstances. If you have any concerns a vet will be happy to discuss this with you.

Fluke

The overall NADIS parasite forecast for the region is low to moderate however with the changing trends in weather and often very localised droughts, floods that we have seen this year it has become clear that we need to treat each farm individually. Autumn is a great time to use diagnostic testing to see if you have a potential problem on your farm. Using this seasons lambs will give a good indicator of the likelihood of fluke being present in your other stock. As fluke products have no persistency if you treat now when there are potentially no fluke, sheep will not have any protection for later in the year when they may be exposed. This obviously costs you money, not only on wasted product but wasted labour time, and effectively is useless other than to encourage resistance to the product. There are lots of different ways to look for fluke on a farm and some of you will be regularly receiving abattoir feedback (which we will happily discuss with you if needed) but some of you may not sell direct to abattoir or at least not have anything to at the moment. In this situation and as an adjunct we can sample blood and/or faeces in a group of 6 to 12 animals to decide whether treatment is needed at this time or not. We can also discuss the most appropriate product if it is needed. Give the practice a call if you want to discuss testing.

Quarantine

Don't forget to quarantine and treat any incoming stock appropriately to prevent buying in parasites that could be resistant to standard products or that you may not have had on the farm before and could devastate your flock. We can advise on appropriate treatments and can even supply doses of some of the products for individuals or groups so you don't have to waste product.

Successful Topping Tips

Ewe Nutrition

- Good quality feed pre-topping and during the first few weeks of the breeding season for ewes still in poorer body condition (less than 3-3.5) may help rescue ovulation and twinning rates.
- All ewes should remain on a rising plane of nutrition throughout topping and up to at least 4 weeks after mating to aid conception and embryo survival.

Ram to ewe ratio

- Where teasers or other synchronisation has been used, use experienced rams at a 1:30 ratio
- Where no manipulation has been used, experienced rams should go in at a 1:50 ratio. If you plan to extend this then the ram really needs a thorough fertility exam to make sure you achieve targets
- Young inexperienced ram lambs need to be eased into their first breeding season, at a ratio of 1:20 serving adult ewes, not ewe lambs

Fertility Monitoring

- Raddle markers or chest paint will help highlight any ewe or ram fertility/libido issues
- Repeat raddle marked ewes will also help spot ram fertility issues. Different colours will allow ID of specific rams meaning any suspect rams can be semen tested and replaced if needed. Further investigation of other causes of poor fertility may be required if the ram isn't at fault
- Check rams regularly for harness sores

- Final raddled ewe numbers can help plan key management tasks such as vaccination as well as labour requirements throughout the lambing period

Implantation Care

- Implantation of the embryo in the uterus occurs 19 days after mating. Failure of implantation may present as delayed returns to oestrus (longer than 17 days), high barren rates at scanning and reduced lamb numbers.

Implantation failure can be due to:

- Stress from handling/gathering in the immediate post mating period. Be selective about what tasks need to be done for 30-40 days after topping
- Abrupt changes to diet/quality of nutrition
- Prolonged physical stress e.g. excessive transport
- Inflammatory diseases around mating e.g. acute/sub-acute liver fluke, sheep scab, lameness
- Trace element deficiencies e.g. selenium or iodine deficiency – blood testing is needed to confirm
- Reproductive infections e.g. Toxoplasmosis

Mating Targets

- All ewes should be mated during the first 17-day period = all ewes are covered in raddle marker
- 98% of the flock should be pregnant within 2 cycles (34 days)
- Less than 8% of ewes returning after their 1st serve i.e. being marked again during the second 17-day cycle

The use of flock health discussions can help you identify areas that may be an issue especially if you have figures available from previous breeding and lambing seasons. Profit or loss is very closely related to topping success, so it is worth investing some time to reflect, plan and action ideas.