



THE
WOOD
VETERINARY
GROUP



With the night's drawing in and the temperature falling, it is certainly starting to feel like winter. After storm Babet in late October, the ground is certainly looking wet in areas, unfortunately providing an increased risk of lameness and fluke. This month's newsletter focuses on such...

Liver Fluke

Liver fluke (*Fasciola hepatica*) affects both cattle and sheep. It is transmitted via the mud snail, which, unsurprisingly, are found in muddy areas, e.g. by natural water sources. Unlike gut worms, sheep cannot develop immunity to fluke and so are always susceptible to infection. As sheep have small livers, they do not tolerate fluke very well at all and clinical signs of liver fluke include anaemia, lethargy, weight loss and bottle jaw. The disease progresses very rapidly and usually ewes are found dead before there is the chance to treat them, hence why fluke control and prevention is key!



The risk of fluke is farm specific, and even field specific, and as anecdotal evidence of resistance to flukicides (the medicines we use to kill fluke) has been reported in the UK, it is very important to perform diagnostic testing to ensure we are using the right product at the right time. A good way to pinpoint when to treat is by blood testing this year's lambs once a month (from August onwards) for fluke antibodies. The presence of antibodies in the blood show that the lambs have been exposed to fluke and so there is a risk present and hence the need to treat. A faecal test can also be used in ewes which identifies coproantigen produced by late immature fluke. Faecal egg counts aren't very useful this time of year as we're concerned about immature fluke, which aren't at the age that they can produce eggs yet.



So, after diagnosing a fluke risk on farm, what should we treat with? Triclabendazole in sheep is effective against flukes aged 2 weeks and over so should be used in the Autumn/Early Winter (dependent on risk on farm). Closantel is effective against flukes aged 6 weeks plus and so should be used in Late Winter/Early Spring. No flukicide has any persistency, meaning it only kills on the day of treatment and no longer, so it is encouraged that sheep are moved to clean, low fluke risk pasture after treatment. Minimising fluke exposure is paramount so try to avoid grazing wet pastures as much as possible and fence off natural water courses. If you do have paddocks with ponds and streams etc then aim to graze these in Summer instead when the fluke risk is low.

Vet attestation forms



From the 13th of December 2023, if you are a non-farm-assured keeper of sheep consigning animals to slaughter you will need a Vet attestation form in order to trade. The purpose of a vet attestation is to comply with export requirements as some parts of most animals slaughtered in the UK are exported to the EU. If a form is needed, a vet visit may be required for an inspection of animals and a discussion of welfare, health and biosecurity – this is a great opportunity to also discuss any other concerns you may also have on farm. It is important to note that DEFRA's Animal Health and Welfare Review Pathway scheme will also fulfil the requirements for the form so it is very worthwhile applying to the scheme to gain government funded vet time on farm. Please don't hesitate to get in contact with us for further information about the attestation forms and/or the Animal Health and Welfare Review.

Lameness

Muddy fields provide a massive risk of lameness in sheep. Not only is lameness a massive welfare issue it is also very detrimental to production through reduced milk and wool quality/yield, poor reproductive performance, increased medicine usage/cost and reduced body condition. Therefore, it is vital to follow the five-point plan to help prevent the incidence of such in your flock...

1. CULL PERSISTENT OFFENDERS

Always record individual lameness cases on farm, including ear tag of animal and the leg affected. Be strict and cull ewes who suffer with 2 or 3 lameness incidences as they are very likely to be a carrier of infection, increasing the burden on the ground. Culling out sheep with less resilience to foot disease will encourage breeding from sheep with genetically better shaped feet and some resistance to the bacteria that cause infectious foot disease, hence decreasing lameness in your future flock.

2. AVOID SPREAD

The bacteria that cause Footrot love muddy areas so try to prevent excess poaching where possible by moving feeders/racks/licks daily, applying lime and woodchip around water troughs and grazing fields one at a time rather than sheep walking through many muddy gateways. Footbathing should be performed as per manufacturers instructions (i.e. at the correct concentration and standing time) and sheep should be kept on clean hard standing for 30 minutes post foot bathing before being returned to clean pasture that hasn't been grazed for 2 weeks. Footbathing can make lameness significantly worse and infect healthy ewes so be sure it is being used for only the right stock at the right time.



3. TREAT QUICKLY

Cases of lameness should be identified and treated under 3 days of lameness to increase efficacy of treatment, reduce infection spread and improve welfare. Lamé sheep should then be isolated away from the flock to prevent infection spreading. It is important to discuss cases with a vet to ensure that the correct treatment is being given for the correct lameness condition. Routine foot trimming is not effective and is very detrimental to lameness incidence as it delays healing and contributes to spread of disease so please do not trim lame feet.

Lambing Courses 2024?! We need your feedback!



In previous years we have hosted an Advanced and a Beginner lambing course for our clients.

Would you be interested in attending lambing courses in 2024? If so, what would topics would you like to cover? We want these to be as helpful as possible so would really appreciate your feedback.

Please get in touch with us!

4. VACCINATE

Vaccination is a vital piece in the puzzle of any lameness control plan and should be tailored to each farms need. For a farm that has seen the benefits of implementing all other elements of the lameness control plan, vaccinating can push infection levels even lower and thus reduce incidence even further

5. QUARANTINE

Sheep should always be sourced from reputable sources with strict lameness protocols. Examine feet before purchase and always quarantine incomers away from your flock for at least 4 weeks to prevent infection with different strains of foot rot or contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD). Use

pasture that is not needed by the main flock for the rest of the season to avoid spreading new strains through your flock. Buying in infected sheep without strict quarantine is a very quick way to have a massive spike in flock lameness.



If you are experiencing more than 2% lameness speak to us about completing a foot health assessment with one of our lameness advisors to really narrow down what areas are creating your lameness issues.



Wood Vets Farm Team



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