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RUMINANT SUMMER 2025 NEWSLETTER

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TRACE ELEMENTS IN LIVESTOCK

Trace elements play an important role in the overall health of livestock. Deficiencies can often cause issues with fertility, increase in still births, issues around lambing/calving and poor growth rates in youngstock. Consequently, issues often become apparent post-spring. Deficiencies usually arise from a lack of dietary intake. Unfortunately, this can vary from year to year, depending on forage and pasture quality. Some other factors can lead to deficiencies of certain elements, for example excess molybdenum, iron and sulphur (all found in the soil) can reduce copper absorption. As well as this, a high worm burden affects cobalt absorption.

The following signs can be suggestive of deficiencies in certain elements:

- Selenium deficiency. Most obvious signs are white muscle disease, still birth, ill thrift, poor growth rates and poor fertility.
- **lodine deficiency**, like selenium, most obvious signs are still birth, ill thrift, poor growth rate, poor milk yield and retained placenta
- Cobalt deficiency typically seen in lambs with poor weight gain and poor hair/wool quality.
- **Copper deficiency.** This is usually associated with swayback in lambs, reduced growth rates in youngstock, reduced fertility and sometimes diarrhoea in cattle
- **Copper toxicity** this usually associated with sheep due to their lower copper tolerance and commonly presents as weakness, jaundice, anaemia and even death.

If suspicions of trace element issues arise, then diagnostic tools can be used to uncover any problems. This largely consists of blood sampling 6-10 animals 6 weeks prior to breeding combined with forage analysis.

Following diagnostic testing, corrections can be made with various options for supplementation. As vets we would recommend correcting problems with boluses as this provides controlled amounts of elements over a long period. Drenches can also be used, but these only last short term. Similarly lick buckets are available but be aware that we can't quantify how much the livestock will be ingesting!



Written By Lydia Cotton BVMSci, MRCVs



WORM MANAGEMENT IN SHEEP

The Importance of Monitoring Worms in Sheep

Spring is now behind us, so the next obstacle for our flocks is management of potential worm burdens as we enter the warmer periods. Worm management is crucial around this time of year - routine faecal sample testing is recommended as generally worm infestations aren't noticed until they are so great that they cause clinical signs. By then it may be too late to treat!

So, what are the worms we look out for?

- Haemonchus contortus:
 - Also known as the "Barbers pole worm". This roundworm can affect ewes in both acute and subacute forms. Acute is a high quantity infestation in a short period of time. The animal becomes anaemic due to the worms feeding off their blood. The main clinical signs are weakness and pale gums and inner eyelids.
 - Sub-acute is an infestation of a mild quantity of larvae. The larvae feed on the blood over a prolonged period. This causes a decrease in blood protein which can result in fluid settling in the jaw commonly referred to as "bottle jaw". Sheep will generally fail to thrive and have poor body condition.
- Nematodirus battus:
 - The *Nematodirus* risk period runs from late spring to the early summer months. Generally, it affects lambs between the age of 4-12 weeks (once they start eating grass). Unfortunately, clinical signs (including sudden death, profuse watery diarrhoea and dullness) are caused by juvenile stages not egg-producing adults, so infection with this worm is difficult to detect on a faecal egg count. Please make use of the SCOPS *Nematodirus* forecast to check the risk in your location and call us for treatment recommendations.
- Trichostrongylus/Teladorsagia:
 - This is the most common worm to affect sheep. The main clinical signs are poor weight gain, scour, inappetence and, in heavy burdens, death. A routine faecal egg count is a good test to check for the presence of these worms.
- Dityloccaulus filaria:
 - Also known as "lungworm". Although more commonly seen as an issue in cattle, lungworm can affect sheep as well. Lungworm is usually an autumn disease, but we must be vigilant as weather conditions in the UK summer months can lead to eggs being ingested prior to autumn. Clinical signs are increased respiratory rate alongside a dry husky cough.

We are all aware of the increased resistance noticed in common day to day wormers used on farm. The best advice would be to perform regular faecal egg counts and discuss with the vets and SQPs on what product is best for your farm at the time. Make sure to keep an eye on the SCOPS website for the *Nematodirus* forecast and further advice on all of the parasites that may affect your flock.



Written By Louise Conway Dr MedVet, MRCVS



SHEEP SCAB

What is scab?

Scab is an infective parasitic mite that lives on sheep but can survive in the environment for 17 days. It can take 40-50 days following infection for signs to be seen. It causes fleece loss, loss of condition, rubbing, stamping, skin thickening and even open wounds on sheep. Carcasses can be condemned at the slaughterhouse due to scab infestation.



Scab is brought in by carrier sheep. Good biosecurity is essential, especially when buying in stock.

Markets and transport lorries are major sources of infection. It is essential to isolate any new stock to safeguard your flock, even if the flock they come from is scab free.

Due to the risk of infection in transit, and the long length of time before the development of clinical signs, all new sheep must be assumed as carriers. If you are suspicious of scab or want to ensure your flock does not get infected from new arrivals, 28 days of quarantine and close examination of any new arrivals is highly recommended.

Diagnosing scab

As with most parasites, fast and effective diagnosis is extremely important. We can get a vet out to take skin scrapes from the edge of the lesion or blood test twelve affected ewes. The skin scrape relies on seeing the mites under a microscope but is very effective if the mites are found. The blood test relies on antibodies produced in response to the scab mites. It can take two weeks or more to develop antibodies following exposure and sheep can test positive for months following an infestation.

Diagnosis by a vet also helps differentiate scab from other external parasites, like lice. The treatments for lice generally do not treat for scab, and vice versa (apart from Golden Fleece).



Treatment

Treatment of scab comes in two forms, either dipping or injectable preparations. Dipping is preferred due to its residual action, killing mites for several weeks following administration. Dipping also has no effects on internal parasites, which is useful for stopping resistance developing. Dipping must be performed by a qualified professional. It would be the preferred option for larger groups of effected ewes and will work out cheaper than injectable preparations.

Anti-scab injections come from the clear family of wormers. They have longer milk, and meat withholds and will also expose any worms in the ewes. Treatment can be either one or two injections depending on the product, and mites can remain infective for two weeks after injection. Injecting individual ewes often gets difficult with larger groups of sheep! Some mites have also proven resistant to the active ingredients in these wormers, and by excessively using them we can encourage resistance in gut worms.

If you have any questions regarding scab, treatment or diagnosis, please give us a call! A vet will be happy to talk over the best system we can implement in your flock to avoid scab going forwards.

Written By Samuel Clark BVM,BVS, BVMedSci (hons), MRCVS





FECPACK SERVICE

Interested in using our Faecal Egg Counting service? A revolutionary worm management tool for your animals. Carried out in-house by our expertly trained farm dispensary team. Results reported to you by our vets and RAMs within 24 hours. Be sure that you are doing the best by your animals. Call our Farm Dispensary Team to find out just how easy it is to get a sample to us.

