



Resist resistance

Remain vigilant against wormer resistance

WORMER RESISTANCE has become such a problem that sheep can no longer be kept in certain regions in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Africa. While the situation in the UK is far less serious, producers need to remain vigilant, says Neil Laing of the Clyde Veterinary Group.

Overcoming wormer resistance within individual farm flocks is a challenge, because there is no 'one size fits all' solution, says Mr Laing. However it is important for producers to be aware of the risks. A good anthelmintic policy which takes into account possible wormer resistance can save producers money, as they may need to worm their livestock less frequently, or stop using ineffective wormers, as part of their programme.

SCOPS (Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep) says it is important that drenching is carried out correctly, in order for it to be effective. Underestimating the weight of sheep is a common cause of under dosing. "Select and weigh the

biggest sheep in the group to determine the correct dose," their website advises. "If there is a wide range of weights, consider splitting the group, then weigh the heaviest in each section."

Always check the drench gun is delivering the right amount before use and ensure you drench correctly. "Make sure the sheep are properly restrained and can't leap around when you are drenching, so they swallow the whole amount. Sheep can suffer serious injury, or even death, if they are unrestrained and the gun penetrates the tissues at the back of the mouth." SCOPS adds that research has shown that the efficacy of the white (1-BZ) and clear (3-ML) drenches can be improved by withholding food for 12-24 hours before treatment.

All in-coming sheep should be quarantined and SCOPS says that three important steps should be followed. First of all, yard all sheep on arrival for 24-48 hours. "Any worm eggs already in the faeces when the sheep are treated will

escape exposure to the anthelmintic," the SCOPS website says. "Yarding makes sure these are not dropped on to pasture." Next, drench with monepanthel (new 4-AD class) immediately followed by moxidectin. "To guard against importing anthelmintic resistance, you need to make sure that all worms in the sheep are killed. Just using one produce would leave the risk that worms resistant to that group were allowed to survive. It is worth the investment."

Finally, turn the sheep out to pasture that has already carried sheep this season and keep isolated for at least three weeks. "You need to make sure that should any worms survive treatment, they don't go on to reproduce alone and populate a clean pasture. incoming sheep need to pick up the worm population present on your farm as soon as possible. Remember - it is your flock you are trying to protect, not the incoming sheep."

Growth rates will be slower in lambs suffering from the effect of wormer resistance and they may show signs of scouring and anaemia. Producers whose sheep are not thriving and who suspect that wormer resistance might be to blame, should first speak to their vet, who may recommend dung sampling.

If no action is needed after sampling, it is advisable to carry out faecal egg sampling before using the wormer on the next occasion, as treatment may not be necessary. If the problem needs to be addressed, post-drench testing one to two weeks after worming will demonstrate the efficacy of the product used.

"It is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of eggs per sample which constitute an unacceptable level," said Mr Laing. "A result showing 400-500 eggs per gram would usually indicate the need for treatment, but sheep on some farms appear to be more tolerant of a heavy worm burden than others."

The loss of performance due to worm infestation may not be apparent unless the anthelmintic has proved less than 50 per cent effective, says Mr Laing. If the sheep still have dirty back ends after treatment, then resistance may be an issue. Farms with a resistant worm population as low as 20 per cent will suffer production losses, he warns.

"Wormer resistance can creep up on farms and the effect can be so gradual that it is easy to miss. In some cases, clients have reported that they cannot get their lambs away any younger than six months - this may be perceived as the norm, but in reality, wormer resistance could be to blame."