

Farmers reminded to be aware of sheep scab as sales season approaches

SHEEP scab was a discussion topic at the recent Clyde monitor farm meeting, hosted by Andrew Baillie, at Carstairs Mains, South Lanarkshire.

Mr Baillie said: "I am aware of problems an on-farm sheep scab outbreak could create. It could jeopardise a whole season's worth of tup sales. As a common sense approach, we routinely treat all sheep, pre-tupping, in September."

Sheep scab is a notifiable disease, with farmers required to speedily report suspected cases to their local Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) office, while also alerting neighbouring farmers.

Veterinary surgeon Neil Laing, of the Clyde Vet Group, told the group: "Scab is spread from sheep to sheep or can be caught by an uninfected sheep rubbing against something such as a fence post where an infected sheep has been scratching.

Sheep scab mites feed on blood and can survive for up to 17 days between blood feeds, in a variety of environments.

Products

There are a number of sheep scab control products, both injections and dips available, with withdrawal periods ranging from fewer than 50 to more than 100 days.

Mr Laing said any farmer choosing to plunge dip should adhere to manufacturer instructions, in particular the maximum number of sheep to be dipped before emptying and re-filling the dipper. He also urged farmers to follow guidance regarding length of immersion time for each sheep, along with the number of times the head needs to be submerged.

There can be problems associated with disposal of plunge dip solutions and not every farmer will have dipping facilities.

For this reason, many opt to use



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injectable endectocides. Although an effective treatment for scab, injectable endectocides will kill intestinal worms, so their use should be part of the farmer's worm control strategy in order to minimise the development of anthelmintic resistance.

Mr Laing said when buying-in any sheep, best practice is to keep all incoming sheep in isolation and treat them with a sheep scab product (either dip or injectable). These sheep should not be mixed with the main flock for at least seven days after treatment.

A valuable weapon in the battle against sheep scab has recently been developed by the Moredun Research Institute, and is scheduled for launch in September 2015. This diagnostic blood test detects sheep scab antibodies well before any suspicious symptoms are displayed by the sheep.



Farmers are required to speedily report suspected sheep scab cases to their local APHA office.