

# Planning ahead key to avoid annual setbacks caused by coccidiosis

**A** need for education about the year-on-year implications of coccidiosis, compounded by two years of poor weather during the lambing season, has led to increased cases of clinical coccidiosis for lowland intensive sheep farmers.

Incidences of clinical cases have definitely increased in recent years, warns Jenny Hull, from Alnorthumbria Veterinary Practice. "I saw more coccidiosis last year than I have done in the six years I've been at the practice.

"With the extremely cold spring last year starting with snow in March, lambs were kept in the lambing sheds longer than usual, resulting in them being faced with a higher coccidiosis challenge than expected," says Miss Hull.

"When lambs were eventually turned out, the grass was extremely short due to the poor weather conditions and lambs were eating down into the wick and the soil. This will have potentially increased the coccidiosis exposure for young lambs."

She also notes this increased challenge was mirrored by other diseases. "For example we saw more cases of cryptosporidium than usual."

Coccidiosis is a complex disease to understand on-farm. Lambs need to be exposed to the disease in low levels so they can build a natural immunity to the disease. Knowing if lambs are exposed to a low level or a high level of coccidiosis is difficult to establish without previous knowledge of the farmland.

Miss Hull points out farmers tend to use the same small paddocks near the farm buildings year-on-year to turn the new born lambs out on to, as they are 'handy'.

She warns, "This will perpetuate the coccidiosis problem, and being aware of the disease risks on these fields is important."



Jenny Hull

Coccidiosis oocysts on the land shed by ewes and lambs from previous years are the main source of infection for young lambs. Once ingested, naive lambs will multiply the infectious coccidiosis oocysts at a vast rate, excreting them back onto the land, further increasing the disease levels.

## Increased risk

Year-on-year, the coccidiosis risk in these well used pastures will increase unless an effective product is used to reduce the amount of oocysts which are excreted from the lambs back onto the land. Long term effective management of coccidiosis involves reducing this pasture disease burden.

The high risk age period for lambs is four to six weeks of age, explains Miss Hull. "We tend to find farmers wait until they see clinical signs; lambs experiencing scours, dirty lambs, and generally appearing tucked up with a dull, poor appearance, before they consider treatment."

"This means farmers are left chasing their tail with coccidiosis." She adds if the disease is left to develop, the lambs will experience costly setbacks.

"The worst case scenario is death, but more commonly they will suffer gut damage which will cause reduced weight gain which can take a long time to recover from."

She adds lambs may never properly catch up following a coccidiosis outbreak, remaining stunted; taking longer to finish and reach their full potential.

Miss Hull says to manage the spread of this disease and avoid

any costly implications, it is vital to treat with a product containing toltrazuril before clinical signs are expected, usually at four to six weeks of age. Toltrazuril has been proven to kill all intracellular stages of coc-

cidiosis, meaning treatment at any stage of an outbreak will be effective, but the key is to minimise any potential setbacks. "Catch coccidiosis early; treat the lambs once they have been exposed to the disease, but be-

fore clinical signs are expected to prevent losses."

The key to effectively managing coccidiosis is to predict the peak disease pressures by planning ahead for them, and then treat accordingly, says Miss Hull.

## DO YOU FARM IN A COBALT DEFICIENT AREA?

Sheep producers now have access to an innovative micro bolus supplement that can be administered to lambs from as young as five weeks of age.

COB-I-SEL 25 from Nettex is a slow release cobalt supplement that also delivers iodine, selenium and multi-vitamins. The micro bolus formulation has been developed specifically to help flockmasters maintain optimum cobalt levels in rapidly growing lambs and produce quality carcasses at finish. Its formulation also makes it ideal for targeted use during the ewe's production cycle, such as at pre-tupping or around lambing.

"Cobalt is an essential mineral required for the rumen synthesis of vitamin B12, which is needed for starch metabolism and energy production. Growing lambs have very little storage capacity for these essential micro-nutrients and rely on a daily intake from feed, forage or grazing," points out Nettex technical marketing manager Nia Williams.

"Many pastures are deficient in cobalt – particularly those in Northern Ireland, Scotland, the North of England, Wales, East Anglia and parts of the South West. In some of these areas animals can become cobalt deficient very quickly and will suffer from a condition known as 'pine' if not treated early. Animals affected will typically grow slowly, often remain small and in poor condition, and consequently take far longer to finish – which is costly."

### Significant advantages

Nia Williams says that one of the main advantages of COB-I-SEL 25 micro bolus over other cobalt boluses is that it can be administered to very young lambs (five weeks of age), giving animals the mineral before they can become really deficient. Other available mineral boluses cannot currently be administered to lambs until they reach 8-10 weeks of age, she points out.

"The great benefit of micro bolus technology is that it allows us to produce a supplement that weighs only a single gramme, yet can still deliver 1.4mg of cobalt per day."

There are also other benefits, she says. "Trace element supplementation of sheep and lambs is often challenging, particularly in extensive situations. For example, free access minerals require the animal to sense deficiency and seek out supplementation."

COB-I-SEL 25 is available from agricultural merchant outlets in 250 micro bolus pack sizes. The dosage cost is approximately 24 pence per lamb and 48 pence per ewe. Micro bolus administration should be repeated as necessary at 6-8 week intervals for both lambs and ewes.

COB-I-SEL 25 is available from a range of agricultural merchants across the UK. To find a stockist near you contact your local Nettex Area Business Manager.

For technical nutritional advice please contact:  
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