

SQPs can help farmers spend to save money

Thinking about parasite prevention rather than treating when the problem occurs avoids additional cost and performance losses, says R-SQP **Mark Pass** of Beeston Animal Health, Cheshire

In late winter or early spring I sit down with my farmer customers to discuss parasite plans for the coming year. During February, I visit clients on their farms with the vets from within our business to talk through their animal health plans. Parasite control and prevention is a big part of that.

Each plan is individual. I go through what the customer has been doing to treat parasites, and ascertain the wormers and flukicides they've been using so I can monitor which drugs are being used on-farm.

Once they're engaged in active animal health planning (not just a farm assurance necessity), farmers are more likely to trust your advice when recommending certain products due to their active ingredient, spectrum of activity, persistency, withdrawal periods, and cost.

We encourage regular (FECs) and advise pre-dosing and post-dosing worm FECs throughout the year. These will also check for coccidiosis and nematodirus in lambs, and liver fluke at certain times of the year. We include blood tests to test for trace elements, and investigate performance losses: eg abortion or lameness. When results are in, we sit down with the customer again to form a plan based on individual risk factors. With all that evidence to help, we can be confident that our approach is targeted and cost-efficient.

Each farm works differently, so everything is individual. We create a calendar for each farm including, for example,



dates in which they aim to vaccinate, fluke and worm; when rams go with ewes; scanning and preparation.

Plans will be monitored and adjusted. I keep in contact with my customers and always send the latest NADIS forecasts. The worst thing you can do is draw up a plan and leave it!

REASSURANCE

Farmers want to economise in the current market, but a well-thought-out plan reassures them that they are not spending unnecessarily and, by giving the right product at the right dose and at the right time, they are not pouring money down the drain.

Certain things simply need to be done at certain times of the year, and the costs of not doing them can be far worse –

untreated fluke can be fatal to sheep.

With parasites, symptoms are rarely obvious. Parasites also leave stock susceptible to secondary problems. For example, if you keep on top of a worm problem, this may result in not having to treat for coccidiosis due to better animal health. This can have a positive impact on profitability.

Much can be done to prevent parasites getting a foothold on the farm. Fluke is a good example; reduce the chances of lambs picking up liver fluke by treating ewes before lambing and fencing off wet areas so that the sheep don't come into contact with the mud snails that carry the fluke. I have one farmer who is constantly removing snails on his field. By doing that he has

reduced his need for flukicides.

The flock should be treated for fluke two or three times a year, with the right product at the right time – there is no point in choosing a product to treat all stages of fluke in the spring (for example triclabendazole) as there will not be any early, immature fluke then. As recent winters have been mild, greater use of flukicides is leading to increased reports of fluke resistance, particularly to triclabendazole.

Farm assurance and welfare schemes expect farmers to keep records of products and medicines administered to their livestock, but even without those requirements, keeping a record of medicine use provides a strong foundation on which to base future decisions. Record-keeping is espe-

cially important when you factor in withdrawal periods when choosing animals for market.

A discussion with your customer might highlight that the product with the shortest withdrawal isn't treating the correct stage of liver fluke, or that the wrong animals are being treated. Based on the new SCOPS worming guidelines, for example, the latest advice is that adult ewes often don't need treating. That's why we test first, and then decide if a particular product is needed.

PLANNING

A good treatment plan includes vaccination dates. This makes it simpler to avoid clashes that could affect vaccine efficacy. We carry out bulk milk tests for antibodies in dairy cows, get abattoir reports from farmers and we also encourage post-mortems on dead lambs. A dead lamb might appear to have died of acute fluke, but the post-mortem could pick up pasteurisation or clostridial diseases.

We regularly get 80-90 people at our farm meetings. We all work together, vets, farmers and SQPs, and that support takes a lot of the strain out of the decision-making.

Some farmers say they are fed up with hearing about wormer resistance. Others believe there isn't much they can do to avoid it, but this isn't true. There is only a limited number of active ingredients that we can use, but if we treat them with respect, they will last and ensure farms are viable for the next generation.