

# Lameness queries are a helpful step

Ask the right questions before dispensing treatments, advises sheep vet **Richard Knight**



**Richard Knight**

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One effect of dry, warm, weather generally is that lameness appears to be more prevalent. As with all ailments, it is best to come to an informed conclusion as to the diagnosis, before treatment and control can be considered. Many times the farmer will come to this conclusion themselves, but it does no harm to ask questions before dispensing medicines or treatments such as foot bathing solutions or foot-rot vaccine.

The first question should be, "What did you find when you looked at the feet?"

Further questioning can be about the interdigital skin, coronary band lesions, white line disease, or traumatic



injury. This includes injury from previous, over-zealous, trimming which will lead to a granuloma, or 'cherry', protruding from the damaged area.

Don't be afraid to encourage them to consult their vet to come to a definitive diagnosis and for treatment. Removing things like granulomas requires appropriate local anaesthesia to be done properly, with sometimes even the affected digit requiring removal. To be able to differentiate contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD) from

scald, and even scald from foot-rot, is vital, especially when things like foot-rot vaccine are being used.

We've all had cases where vaccination has been dismissed as ineffective, but no diagnosis had ever been reached. You then go on to find that CODD is the underlying cause, so vaccination would never be expected to work alone!

If you have 10 minutes free during a tea-break, I would advise everyone, farmers most importantly, to watch a YouTube video by Prof Laura Green. Search under 'sheep lameness' and it will come up

second on the list (breezeand-freezeinfo). Economics of treatment, along with diagnosis and approaches to treatment are expertly and succinctly covered. Intervention levels are covered well, illustrating how important it is to treat cases as they arise. Viewers are encouraged to understand just how easily we can damage the ovine foot with shears and hoof knives (the last things that should be reached for).

The picture where Laura shows light shining through the sole of a boiled-out hoof specimen demonstrates their

fragility. Even if you've watched it before, it will be good to revise. Get the kettle on now!

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## Taking it easy bring rewards

What is thought to be one of the largest orders of UK breeding sheep has been secured by the Easy Care Sheep Society, with German farmer Johann Anwander ordering 100 Easy Care ewes and two rams from Anglesey breeder Iolo Owen.

Herr Anwander informed the society that he chose the Easy Care breed for their ease of lambing and natural hair coats, which do not need shearing so are not prone to maggot problems. They will graze a large area of solar panel land in Germany, and it is hoped that because of the low maintenance of the sheep, they will only have to be gathered once a year for weaning.

Mr Owen founded the Easy Care breed in 2003 and was awarded the MBE in 1986 in recognition of his services to agriculture. He says: "Controlling grass under solar panels is one of the biggest problems and it is envisaged that the Easy Care breed will solve this."

The Easy Care Sheep Society was created in 2003, in

response to the growing popularity of the breed. It says there are now 120,000 head in the UK and claims that it cuts 80% of shepherding costs when compared with other breeds. It highlights main features as:

- Ewe body weight around 60kg;
- 1.8 lambs reared per ewe;
- Ease of lambing – specifically developed for this purpose;
- Vitality at birth – born with hair for protection;
- High growth rate – lambs reach 17kg carcass weight at 12 weeks;
- High meat yield;
- Strong sires – rams are particularly pre-potent and virile;
- No shearing and minimal shepherding;
- Low veterinary care;
- Well protected – unaffected by extreme weather conditions;
- Thrives on lowland grass;
- Meets modern market requirements
- Healthy constitution – quick to recover and less prone to many illnesses;
- Very profitable.