

# Follow the three Ts to keep tups in top shape

Check tups now for a good quota of spring lambs, advises sheep vet **Richard Knight**



**Richard Knight**  
Director  
Westmorland Veterinary Group



Although early-season lambing is still very popular – unless you listen to Adam in *The Archers* – in the North, the bulk of sheep still lamb in spring, with the tups being put in on Bonfire Night, or thereabouts.

When considering pragmatic advice on tups, the 'three Ts' need to be considered in order to keep them in tip-top condition for their job. These are Teeth, Tackle and Tootsies, all being similarly important.

While mineral status, body condition and parasite burden are of major concern, it's still amazing how many fail on one of their three Ts.

Farmers should feel all around a tup's mouth for lumps, bumps and pain on the lower jaw, and swellings and pain below the eye and along the face, which may indicate molar tooth problems. Flipping down the bottom lip and looking at the incisors (and canine teeth) is a given – don't forget that there are 24 more teeth in there too!

Tackle is the area which tended to get a cursory examination, but more often these days is properly examined, and sometimes certified by a vet before sale. Checking that the penis is normal and that the testicles are of an even and uniform size and texture, with normal anatomy and a scrotal circumference which fits with the age and breed of sheep, is essential.

Measurement of a tup's testicles before purchase should be a matter of pride for the seller, and a valuable bit of information for the potential purchaser. Semen testing is a

vet job, with most practices who are serious about farm work being able to conduct this test, or at least arrange it. Often a batch of tups are done in a single session from one farm – some practices which have large numbers of large flocks on their books will do dozens in a day for several weeks.

Tootsies, and their ability to stand up to a busy and stressful time of high load for the tup, are a vital part of the plan. If feet are overgrown and infected at the start of tugging, they are going to be in bits by the end, and with fewer ewes bred into the bargain. The article written by me in the last edition of OTC addressed lameness in sheep and all those points are valid here. A factsheet on sheep lameness can also be found on the XLVets website, under the Publications tab, but here is some food for thought:

In recent years there has been a lot of research into the causes of lameness and its treatment. This has produced interesting findings, some of which run against previous old advice. A vital aspect to understanding foot lameness is that the commonest forms – foot-

rot and scald – are infectious diseases. When treated in this manner, rather than treating overgrown feet, the control of the problem is simplified.

- Farmers should discuss control options with their vets, as each farm is different.
- Treat lame sheep as soon as they are seen lame – even if you consider it is only mild.
- Identify the disease – footrot, scald, CODD, white line abscess, toe granuloma.
- Treat all footrot cases with a tetracycline spray and tetracycline injection, but do not trim. There is now clear evidence that trimming feet causes more damage than it cures. The only time trimming should be done is in order to establish a diagnosis and not as part of routine treatment.
- Mark the affected leg.
- Separate from the main flock if possible, and re-examine in seven days. Avoid trimming even at this stage if at all possible.
- Cull sheep with more than two marks as they are carriers and will infect the rest of the flock. Use ear tags to identify repeatedly lame sheep so they can be identified and culled when sound.
- Consider vaccination.

- Use a footbath for the sheep to walk through or stand in every time they are gathered.

- Quarantine all replacements for three weeks. Inspect all feet during this period, treat cases as above and footbath before mixing with the home flock.

- Vaccination can be an important part of a footrot control programme. Vaccinate sheep twice, four to six weeks apart, followed by a booster before periods of maximum risk. Vaccination alone will not control footrot on a farm and

must be part of an overall control programme.

**Richard Knight is a Director at Westmorland Veterinary Group in Cumbria, Lancs and North Yorks (01539 722692).**

**XLVets**  
Excellence in Practice

Westmorland  
Veterinary Group