

Make your farm your fortress by being aware of buying risks

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Whether you buy pedigree breeding stock or regularly pick up store lambs at market, have you considered what unseen diseases you might be bringing back with you?

Discussing biosecurity usually results in eyes glazing over and thoughts of hastily written protocols in the farm assurance health plan. But the reality is that ignoring the biosecurity risks when buying in stock can prove costly. How many times have you heard of someone bringing back a pen of sheep from market and having half the flock become hopping lame? Or the abortion outbreak after getting a bargain deal on some breeding ewes?

The truth is that there are many parasites and infectious diseases that can be carried by apparently healthy animals and some of these are highly contagious. Once your new sheep have come into contact with the rest of the flock and contaminated your land, a new disease is not easy to get rid of. Extra medicine and labour costs plus reduced performance can lead to escalating costs. However, by following a simple quarantine protocol, the likelihood of introducing new diseases can be greatly reduced and any underlying conditions are more likely to be identified.

There are many health issues that we are worried about

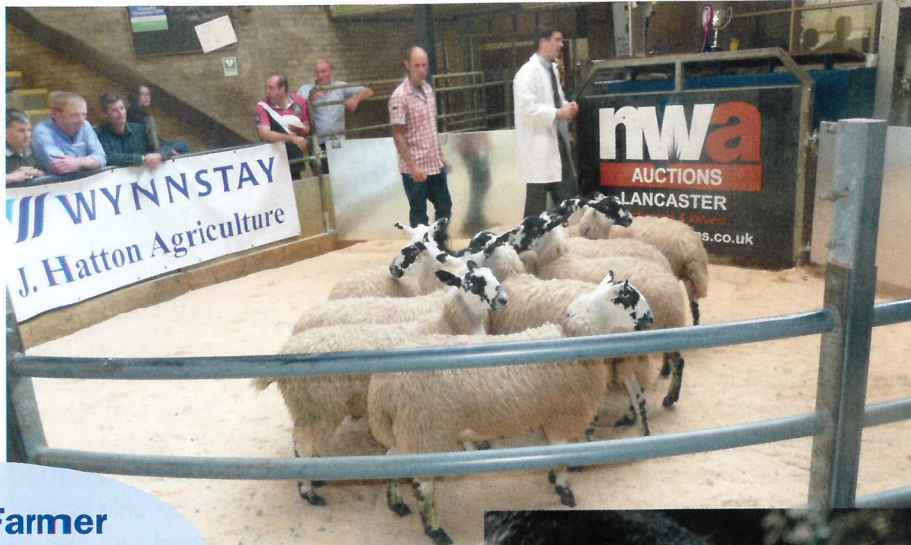
Sheep scab: This is caused by a mite living on the skin of the sheep. It is incredibly contagious and causes intense



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*More on tackling worms and scab on
pages 38-39.*



itching leading to production losses. One of the problems with buying sheep is that they can be carrying scab without showing any signs; in the early stages it is undetectable. There is also the possibility of mites being picked up from the market or transport lorry. The only way of knowing for sure that your sheep do not have scab is to treat them on arrival with an appropriate macrocyclic lactone injection or dip them.

When injecting for scab, 1% moxidectin is recommended by SCOPS, but this must not be used in sheep that have ever had or are likely to be vaccinated against footrot. There are other macrocyclic lactone injections available, but they differ in how long they last and how many injections are required, so consult your vet as to which is the most appropriate treatment for you.

Resistant worms: This is one of the major issues currently facing the sheep industry. Resistance to one or all of the three older generation wormers – 1-BZ (white), 2-LV (yellow) and 3-ML (clear) – is commonplace, resulting in delayed



Top: Healthy sheep can still be carrying unwanted diseases on to your farm.

Whatever the source of incoming stock, treat them as a risk.

Above: CODD is an example of one of the diseases that you do not want to bring on to your farm.

finishing times, wasted time and money.

Even fit sheep can be carrying resistant worms and resistance may be the reason store lambs are in market in the first place! You don't want your land be contaminated with resistant worms so give all bought in sheep a complete clear out with a double wormer treatment – see page 38 for

The reasons behind quarantine protocols for resistant worms

Task	Reason
Yard for 24-48 hours	Allows worm eggs already in the faeces to be passed without contaminating the pasture. This dung should not be spread onto any grazing pasture.
Treat with two products (see page 38 for options)	Treating with two products gives the best chance of killing all resistant worms.
Turn onto contaminated ('dirty') pasture and isolate for at least three weeks	If any resistant worms have survived the treatments, this dilutes them with the farm's existing worm population and reduces the impact of resistant worms being introduced to clean pasture. 'Dirty pasture' is land that has been grazed by sheep within the past 12 months.



Quarantine treatments will protect the rest of your flock against incoming disease.

details on treatment options. This is a belt and braces approach to ensure only a very small possibility of any worms surviving treatment, and must be combined with the right approach to yarding and isolating – see table.

Besides resistant worms, there is the blood sucking worm *Haemonchus contortus*. This worm is not present on every farm but can be devastating. It affects lambs and adult sheep and is seen in late summer and autumn. Heavy burdens will cause anaemia, resulting in weight loss, reduced production and death. It is definitely a worm you don't want on your farm and is another reason to make sure the quarantine treatment is done correctly.

Lameness: All too frequently, contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD) and highly virulent strains of footrot can be introduced into a flock on the feet of bought in sheep. It is important to not only isolate sheep for at least three weeks so lameness can be identified, but to also inspect feet and either footbath or spray with antibiotic. Some lesions can be very subtle and some sheep may carry bacteria without showing many signs of lameness. Quarantine treatment is one of the elements of the five-point plan for lameness control and is a must do for reducing levels of lameness in your flock - more on page 42.

Liver fluke: This is a common parasite in many parts of the country causing weight loss and poor performance, and in many cases death. It can be difficult to treat and manage and there have been an increasing number of reports of flukicide resistance. If your farm is fluke free, don't let it in! See pages 39 and 40 for more on fluke.

Miscellaneous: The diseases discussed so far are some of the more common conditions, but the list is by no means complete. There is an array of diseases out there but not all of them are as easily dealt with.

For example, enzootic abortion is still a common cause of abortion despite an effective vaccine being available. Unfortunately there is no way of knowing if a sheep has it and any bought-in ewes should be considered a risk. If routinely buying replacements, consider vaccinating the flock or source from EAE-accredited free flocks. It is good practice to keep bought in sheep separate from the main flock until after lambing to reduce the risk of disease spread at lambing time.

Maedi visna and caseous lymphadenitis (CLA) are both wasting diseases of which there are accredited free health schemes. Sourcing from these flocks will reduce the chances of bringing in these diseases. Unfortunately, no such schemes currently exist for Johne's disease or ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma (OPA) and testing is problematic. Private sale and knowledge of the flock of origin will give you the best chance of avoiding buying in these diseases.

More at quarantine and best practice use of anthelmintics at www.scops.org.uk. Details of the Premium Sheep and Goat Health Scheme and names of accredited flocks at www.psghs.co.uk.