

This disease can really hit the bottom line

COCCIDIOSIS can severely hold back lambs and affect growth rates if not managed properly this spring, says vet **Joe Henry**, from *Alnorthumbria Veterinary Practice*.

If farmers want to get lambs finished on time, they need to be on top of common disease challenges, and especially coccidiosis, as it is well known to severely affect daily live weight gains.

Lambs should be targeting daily gains of 300 grams a day at four to six weeks of age. However, this is a high-risk period for lambs when it comes to coccidiosis.

Coccidiosis is a complex disease to understand on-farm. Lambs need to be exposed to the disease in low levels, so they can build their own natural immunity. But knowing whether lambs are exposed to a low level, or a high level, of coccidiosis is difficult to establish without previous knowledge of the farm and the grazing history.

"By closely working with farmers to understand the on-farm history, we can establish the right time to effectively treat for coccidiosis," Mr Henry said.

"Coccidiosis levels should be considered on a field-by-field basis. Regularly used fields will have high levels of disease that can affect the following years' lambs when not managed correctly. That's why it's important that farmers view coccidiosis management with a long-



WARNING: Vet Joe Henry

term approach to try and get on top of this recurring disease."

When lambs ingest only one infectious coccidiosis oocyst from the pasture, this has the potential to multiply and turn into 16 million oocysts that are excreted back out on to the pasture, building a higher disease burden for the lambs following on behind.

Mr Henry says that coccidiosis is a nearly impossible disease to remove from fields, and this should form part of any consideration when assessing treatment options.

"Don't wait to see scouring and overt clinical signs of coccidiosis in lambs before treating. Be proactive in your approach and regularly monitor lambs for any signs of depressed weight gain, or lambs generally not doing as expected.

"A decreased daily live weight gain is one of the main outcomes from a coccidiosis outbreak, and this can seriously impact the bottom-line for farmers. It also

often goes unnoticed until the damage is already done.

"Generally, lambs never catch up following a coccidiosis outbreak, remaining stunted and taking longer to reach target weights," said Mr Henry.

Lambs can't make up the lost daily live weight gain, so there is always a cost to the farm business from coccidiosis, however severe the outbreak.

"As the summer goes by, generally the price per kilo drops. So, with every week lost, a likely dent in the margin is seen, with lambs not realising their true cost potential."

Recently published research has confirmed that using one dose of toltrazuril (Baycox) to treat lambs is an effective means of preventing and controlling the disease, killing coccidiosis at all intracellular stages.

This field trial observing 142 weaned lambs affected by subclinical coccidiosis, aged between six and eight weeks. The results showed that faecal oocyst counts dramatically fell by 99.1 per cent in the first seven days following treatment with toltrazuril when compared to the control group that was left untreated.

The same research recorded body weights at the start and end of the trial, which showed a significant increase of an extra 948g over nine weeks in the group treated with toltrazuril, when compared to the control group.



DIFFERENCE: Twin lambs with coccidiosis, one treated with Baycox, one not