



# Farm Veterinary Solutions

Special Edition—Sheep Parasites

2023

## A Guide to Parasites SS23

Welcome to the Special Edition Newsletter focusing on the parasites that may affect your flock this Spring/Summer. This edition will cover some of the most common parasites and their associating diseases that you should be aware and cautious of as well as the steps we should all be taking to support the appropriate use of anthelmintics. It is important to remember every farm is different. You may have different species and populations of parasites to even our neighbours, as well as varying grazing strategies and how that can play a role in parasite burdens. Creating an individual parasite control plan with one of the vets or SQPs will be of real benefit to your flock to control parasites in the most economical and appropriate ways.

### Nematodirus

**Nematodirus can strike very quickly so you can't afford to have a 'wait and see' policy.**

The damage caused by Nematodirus is from large numbers of immature larvae that are not producing eggs, therefore, faecal egg counts (FEC's) are unfortunately not a reliable indicator of risk. Rapid action is required to prevent disease in young lambs based on individual farms and grazing strategies.

Nematodirosis is a particularly nasty disease in lambs, stunting growth and causing a high number of mortalities. Under certain climatic conditions, it can strike very quickly with little or no warning. Scan the QR code below to view the SCOPS Nematodirus Forecast to see the current risk in your area.

#### What are the risk factors?

Lambs that are grazing pasture that carried lambs last spring is the biggest risk factor. Factors to consider alongside this are:

- Are the lambs old enough to be eating significant amounts of grass? (generally 6-12 weeks of age)
- Is there likely to be a challenge from coccidiosis? (e.g. groups with mixed ages lambs)
- Has there been a sudden, cold snap recently followed by a period of warm weather?
- Have you got lambs that are under other stresses? (e.g. triplets, fostered, on young or older ewes)

#### Recommended Action

If and where possible, make the most of your clean pasture! This can include silage aftermath, new lay fields, or any pasture that was not grazed last spring by young lambs. If clean pasture is limited, focus on saving this for the high risk lambs.

If you are unable to avoid the high risk pasture, treat lambs with a white (1-BZ) drench 4-6 weeks after turnout. This allows them to be exposed to some but not a harmful amount of the parasite, enabling them to gain their own resistance to fight off future infections. Follow up this treatment with a FEC 7-10 days later. The correct dosage and administration technique is vital to avoid future problems with anthelmintic resistance.



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### The Importance of Faecal Egg Counts

A faecal egg count (FEC) counts the number of worm eggs in faeces. They are an effective way of monitoring the worm burden in sheep by giving an indication of the number of adult worms in the gut.

#### FECs can be used to:

- Help determine the need for treatment
- Test the efficacy of treatment (checking for resistance)
- Give information on the amount of contamination going on to pasture.

Dung samples should be fresh when collected and kept cool and airtight and should be delivered to the practice within 48 hours. If not fresh or stored incorrectly, interpretations will be inaccurate.

FEC kits are available for free from the practice including sample pots, gloves and information sheets. In-house faecal egg counts are available at the Melton Mowbray and Lutterworth practices.



# Gastrointestinal Roundworms



## *Teladorsagiosis and Trichostrongylosis*

Disease caused by gastrointestinal nematodes is typically acute in onset with clinical disease and in some cases mortality. However, these parasites can also cause sub-clinical disease leading to reduced growth rates, milk and wool production and poor body condition resulting in significant financial loss to the industry.

*Teladorsagiosis* is typically seen in growing lambs and causes profuse watery diarrhoea during mid to late summer alongside dehydration, weight loss and possibly death. In contrast, disease caused by *Trichostrongylosis* is frequently seen in autumn and winter. Lambs present with dark, foul smelling diarrhoea alongside weight loss, dehydration and possibly death.

All ages of sheep carry these roundworms, but adult sheep mostly have good immunity and rarely show signs of infection. However, it is possible for ewes to lose their immunity around lambing time and are often the main source of pasture contamination for growing lambs as they start to graze.

The timing of these worms appearing on pasture and the level of challenge they pose to stock depends entirely on previous grazing management and weather conditions. They will usually complete several lifecycles during a grazing season with pasture contamination increasing rapidly when lambs and ewes continually graze the same pastures.

Although not possible for everyone, a good system for pasture rotation is the basis for excellent parasite control. Where this is not possible, there are other therapeutic and strategic methods which enable us to significantly reduce parasite burdens. The most key aspect of these methods is to make good and regular use of faecal egg counts (FEC).

**Do you also keep cattle? Consider co-grazing to help reduce pasture contamination!**

## *Haemonchosis*

*Haemonchus contortus*, also known as Barber's Pole worm, can infect sheep of all ages and lives in the abomasum of affected sheep feeding on blood through the stomach wall. Ingestion of large numbers of larvae over a short period of time causes acute disease with severe anaemia, lethargy, weakness and sometimes collapse and death. Ingestion of smaller numbers of larvae over a longer time period causes a more general loss of condition progressing to emaciation, moderate anaemia and bottle jaw. Diarrhoea is not associated with infection of *H. contortus*.

FECs with very high counts can indicate *H. contortus* infection. This can be confirmed with speciation tests at an external laboratory. Resistance has been reported to some of the wormer groups but Closantel is highly effective against the blood sucking worm.

Over recent years, the incidence, frequency of reports and geographical range of *Haemonchosis* have all increased—most likely a consequence of climate change. The drought and warm weather last year led to a high number of severe cases of *Haemonchosis*, many of which we assisted with diagnosis and treatment. It had devastating effects for many farms and is something we encourage you all to be aware of this year, regardless of weather conditions.

As with all of the other species of worms mentioned, good pasture management and effective use of FECs is key! Choosing the right product for treatment can be difficult. Call us to speak to one of the vets of SQPs for advice.



*Bottle jaw seen in a chronically infected ewe—Nadis*



*Haemonchus contortus. (Barber's Pole Worm)*

## SCOPS

### *Sustainable Control of Parasites*

SCOPS is an industry led group that works in the interest of the UK sheep industry. It recognises that, left unchecked, anthelmintic resistance is one of the biggest challenges to the future health and profitability of the sector.



The SCOPS group was formed to develop sustainable strategies for parasite control in sheep, facilitate and oversee the delivery of these recommendations to the industry and ensure that the new research and development is incorporated to refine and improve advice given to the sheep industry.

## *Top 10 SCOPS Facts*

1. Effective anthelmintics (wormers) are essential for worm control in UK sheep flocks.
2. Millions of pounds' worth of wormers are not used effectively.
3. Resistance to anthelmintics can be bought in with replacements.
4. Mature, fit, healthy sheep have immunity to most worms which means they require minimal treatment.
5. You can check if you have resistance on your farm simply and cheaply using faecal egg counts (FEC).
6. Most farmers who use FECs use less anthelmintic without any loss in performance.
7. If you know which internal parasites you have on the farm, you can target them more effectively.
8. Drenching sheep and then putting them straight onto clean pasture increases the risk of anthelmintic resistance.
9. Sheep are being bred that have greater resistance to worms.
10. It is not too late! You can slow down the development of resistance.

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