



Farm Vet News

Fortnightly blog of Endell Farm Vets

Endell Vets Sheep Team

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Early Lamb Growth and Production



Recommendations to minimise the impact of Nematodirus are mentioned below:

- Identify high risk pastures (those grazed by previous seasons lambs) and avoid grazing current lamb crop on these pastures during peak risk times
- Regularly consult the SCOPS parasite forecast to identify the peak risk period
- Monitor lambs closely for signs of disease including diarrhoea, dirty back ends, lethargy and dehydration
- Discuss treatment options with your vet. Although white drench wormers are usually very effective, measures should be taken to minimise potential resistance build up. This includes dosing to correct weights.

WORMING!

A subject which is focused on every year, but each year still doesn't become any less important! With the changing weather and seasons, especially after the warm wet winter we have had, parasite control can be an unpredictable problem on many sheep farms.

Nematodirus Battus

Nematodirus battus is the first parasite we see infecting our lambs as they are turned out onto pasture, and it is one of the only gut parasites which can pass directly from one seasons lamb crop to the next. Pastures can become highly infective in a short space of time when there are favorable conditions for mass hatching and emergence of eggs on the pasture into infective larval stages.

Lambs begin to graze at 6 weeks old and have no immunity against parasites in their first grazing season. If favorable conditions and mass hatching of Nematodirus coincide with lambs beginning to graze it can cause significant losses. Clinical signs include sudden onset diarrhoea, dehydration and death. Due to the rapid onset of clinical signs and deterioration to death caused by Nematodirus larvae, the disease can be challenging to diagnose in alive animals. Post mortem diagnosis is relatively straight forward but where possible we need to aim to prevent and control the potential implications of this disease rather than diagnose after losses have already started to occur.

Control of the parasite relies on identification of previously contaminated pastures and careful monitoring of weather conditions which can help to predict when mass hatching is likely to occur. SCOPS (Sustainable Control of Parasites (www.scops.org.uk)) regularly publish data on weather conditions and the likelihood of hatching across the UK which can help with treatment decisions and regimes.

Nematodirosis is a nasty disease in lambs, causing a high number of mortalities and reduced growth rates. It is caused by the Nematodirus battus worm, which has a different lifecycle to other sheep worms. Under certain climatic conditions it can strike very quickly, with little or no warning.

Parasitic Gastroenteritis

As the year progresses other gastrointestinal parasites become more relevant to the growing lamb. There are a number of species of parasite which typically cause a disease termed 'parasitic gastroenteritis' (PGE) which is often seen throughout the summer, autumn and into early winter.

Lambs often become infected due to higher shedding of eggs from ewes around lambing time. This rise in egg counts in ewes is known as the 'periparturient rise' and is a result of a reduced immune response in the ewe around lambing time which leads to increased contamination of the pasture. Clinical signs include profuse watery diarrhoea and weight loss/weight gain reduction.

Lambs consume larvae off the pasture which progresses into the adult stage of the worm inside the lamb. These adults start to lay eggs which are passed in the faeces to continue reinfection of the pasture. Diagnosis of active infection involves identification of these eggs in a faecal sample, Faecal Egg Counting (FEC).

Faecal Egg Counts

Faecal egg counts (FECs) are very important not only in the diagnosis of current active infections but information collected from regular faecal egg counting can help your vet identify patterns of hatching and infection on your farm and are critical in the development of a control strategy.



SUMMARY

Whilst worming is a topic which is discussed every year, and the repetition can get boring, parasite control is a constantly moving target, often as a result of changing weather and seasons in the UK which can make predicting burdens difficult. We need to be careful with our treatment selections and should always be mindful of the SCOPS recommendations when considering treatments. The advice is to move away from regular, frequent dosing and FECs are a good tool to identify worm burdens on farm which help tailor our control and treatment strategies.

Within the practice, we are able to offer Faecal Egg Counts. If you want to discuss FECs and parasite control in any more detail, please call us on 01722 333291 for advice.