



Smallholder's News

Endell Farm Vets

Endell Vets Smallholders

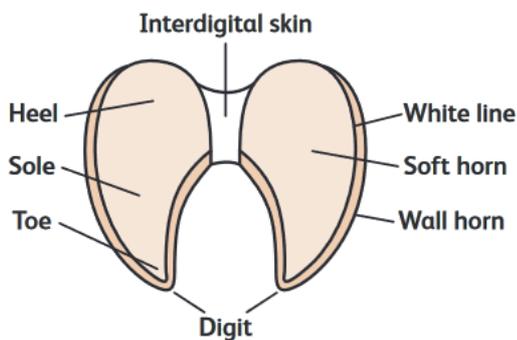
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Foot Health in your Flock

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest causes of poor welfare in a flock is lameness, whether it's due to the presence of infection or unfavourable ground conditions. Historically, it was thought that routine sheep foot trimming helped to reduce lameness levels; we now know that it often causes higher levels of lameness due to over trimming, delayed wound healing, poor weight bearing and the spread of infection from the equipment used.

What is a normal foot? Two claws are surrounded by a hard wall of horn, with softer horn at the base of each claw. The skin between claws should be light pink and dry. The horn of the sole is only a few mm thick and is sensitive to trauma or excessive weight bearing, we therefore want a sheep to bear weight on the wall horn, which should extend beyond the sole. There should be no heat, smell or separated horn. Even if the wall horn is curling over this is unlikely to cause harm so should not be trimmed, unless severely overgrown and lame.



COMMON FOOT INFECTIONS

Scald: Also known as interdigital dermatitis, this is most common in wet conditions in younger animals whereby the skin between the claws becomes inflamed. Individuals should be treated with an antibiotic spray and kept on dry ground. As there is no damage to the claws, no foot trimming!

*It is very important to promptly treat lameness,
but not necessarily trim the foot.*

Footrot: Footrot is seen when infection spreads up to the claws, and separation of the horn tissue of the sole will start to occur. This is extremely painful and must be treated immediately. Treatment typically involves antibiotics and pain relief. Foot trimming will not only worsen matters by delaying wound healing, but can lead to painful tissue proliferation, known as a granuloma. If you have lameness concerns, speak to one of our vets for advice on appropriate treatments.

Abscess: An abscess around the white line (near the toe) is one of the few cases where trimming may be required. This is severely painful for sheep, and you may see pus draining from one of the claws or around the coronary band. If you suspect this in a member of your flock we would recommend speaking to one of our vets for advice.



THE FOOT ON THE RIGHT SHOWS A TYPICAL APPEARANCE OF SCALD

TRIMMING

So when can you trim? In general, our advice is that if you think trimming may be necessary, you should speak to the vet first, unless you're confident, the foot looks normal except that the hoof wall is severely overgrown and the sheep is lame. A toe abscess may require trimming to allow drainage of pus, however, if not done properly then damage may be done to sensitive structures within the hoof sole, resulting in further lameness.

SUMMARY

In summary, maintaining good foot health in your flock is essential in ensuring their welfare remains at the highest of levels and keeps them happily grazing. If you have any comments or questions from this article, please contact the practice on 01722 333291 or email me at harry@endellfarmvets.co.uk