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Farm Newsletter
July 2021

July is Lameness Month

Sheep flocks often suffer from an increase in lameness during the summer months – hence our adoption of July as Lameness Month to focus on measures to bring peace of mind and prevent problems developing when the flock may not be easily accessible.

The run up to weaning is an ideal time to identify and note problems before any disease becomes more established. Check sheep's feet regularly, as sheep with early stage footrot or contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD) have been known not to appear as being lame. At weaning time, mark any persistently lame ewes for culling, and if flock replacements are home-bred, make sure breeding is only from sound ewes or ewe lambs that have not been lame.

Most sheep lameness in the UK is caused by the bacteria *Dichelobacter nodosus*, which can appear as scald or as footrot. If allowed to progress, it causes significant discomfort and welfare concerns due to the obvious pain. Becoming more widespread is CODD, caused by a treponeme bacteria, it has a progressive nature and in its later stages can cause severe lameness. These are the two most important causes of lameness in UK sheep; they may be two different diseases yet are strongly associated in the way they cause infection and are spread. Footrot is certainly a risk factor for CODD, so by keeping this widespread disease under control will help reduce the impact of CODD in the flock.

Recent work has looked at management practices that can reduce the levels of lameness found in a sheep flock. This includes the development of an industry accepted framework, the FAI Five Point Plan has the following steps to establish best practice for managing lameness in sheep. The aim is to get lameness incidence down to 2% or less.

1. **Vaccination** is an aid to treating footrot and preventing lameness by stimulating immunity. Vaccination should be on a whole flock basis and timed to be given just before increased disease risk. It has also been demonstrated[1], in mixed infections of footrot & CODD, that by managing footrot with vaccination first, has enabled more successful treatment and control of CODD.

2. **Culling** persistently infected sheep, especially at the start of a control programme, brings a reduction in lameness as these animals are "constantly shedding" infection.

3. **Avoid** disease transmission by paying attention to good hygiene, minimising the gathering of sheep, using footbaths* for disinfection and stopping trimming** infected feet – see below for more information.

4. **Treating** within 3 days should be the foundation of any protocol to reduce infectious lameness, both for welfare and infection control. Affected animals should be isolated for monitoring and to reduce disease spread.

5. **Quarantine**, a standard biosecurity procedure, should be for a minimum 4-week period. If any sheep shows signs of lameness during quarantine, isolate them and treat appropriately before being introduced to the flock.

Lameness remains a significant welfare and economic issue for sheep flocks in the UK. Adopting the Five Point Plan in its entirety has been shown to give the greatest chance of reducing lameness by a combination of standard farm practices that decrease the level of risk. Conversely, it has been seen that by dropping any one of the five management practices, there is often a resulting increase in the prevalence of lameness in the flock – that's why it is called the **Five** Point Plan.

If you are interested but not sure where to start, we can help with a lameness control planner. This will help look at your flock and see where the gains can be made. If you are interested, please contact the surgery on 01835823257.

SAC Project: Rickets in Sheep

The SAC are currently undertaking a project to try and establish the incidence of rickets in sheep flocks.

A small number of cases have been diagnosed in the last 5 years, however it tends to be sporadic and small numbers of the flock are reported so the belief is that it is actually much more common than we think.

Cases are often seen in hoggs returning from wintering and the classic signs of rickets include limb deformities, stiffness, and/or lameness not associated with the foot.

If you think you may have seen rickets in your flock, please let us know so we can contribute to the SAC project.

Exporting Sheep from Sales

Just a reminder that in order for breeding sheep to be exported from the UK, it is now necessary for scrapie testing to be carried out. It is not possible to export sheep direct from sales without this.

There are two ways that a flock can attain the appropriate scrapie-free status:

1. Blood sampling individual animals to be exported prior to export. N.B. Samples can take 3 weeks to process and samples have to be sent to an approved lab (SAC or APHA). However the APHA have an expedited service for an additional fee

2. Become a scrapie-monitored flock. This is a scheme run by the SAC that requires all fallen stock to be scrapie tested via an approved knackery (SB & Co). **Takes 3 years to qualify.**

In the short term, this summer, all potential exports must have an individual blood sample taken prior to sale or export**.** I would recommend investigating the SAC scheme for future years. Details are available on the SAC website:

https://www.sruc.ac.uk/business-services/what-is-your-goal/veterinary-laboratory-services/sheep-and-goat-health-schemes/scrapie-monitoring-for-export/

Good Luck Katy!

We are sad to report that Katy will be leaving the practice at the end of June to pursue a career in farm animal reproduction. She has always had a keen interest in the farm side of the practice and now she is embarking on a new role with AB Europe in Edinburgh, concentrating on sheep embryo transfer and AI.

Katy has been part of the Greenside team since graduating in 2017 and she has proved to be an incredibly competent and capable vet. All of us will be very sad to see her go but fully support her decision to move and gain experience in a different sector.

We are currently working on finding a replacement for her but our 2020 graduate, Theresa, has moved from a small animal only to a mixed role this spring in anticipation of Katy leaving and is proving more than capable. We are also hopefully, in the final stages of agreeing a contract with an experienced farm vet to join the practice in the autumn.

We wish Katy all the very best for her future; she will doubtless be a real asset wherever she works.