The GEORGE Farm Vets

Roundworms
Advice for worming ewes and lambs
March 2020

With the horrendous weather we've experienced lately it feels like it'll be ages before we need to worry about worms, but spring will be here before we know it (hopefully)! In this newsletter we will discuss the different types of roundworm that affect sheep, and advice for treatment of ewes and lambs.

Nematodirus Battus worm

Nematodirus

This is the one worm where we recommend treatment not based on faecal egg counts. Disease from Nematodirus strikes quickly and the damage is done before eggs appear in the faeces, so we need to use different tools to decide when to treat.

Risk factors include:

- Lambs starting to eat a lot of grass, so 6-12 weeks old (or younger if ewes are short of milk.)
- Warm weather following a cold snap- this allows larvae which have been on the pasture over winter to hatch and become infectious.
- Lambs under other stress e.g. triplets
- Lambs grazing pasture grazed by lambs last spring.
- History of Nematodirus on farm.

What can you do?

Keep lambs on low risk pasture, i.e. that which was not grazed by lambs last spring. If this is not possible then use the risk factors and the Nematodirus forecast, available on the NADIS website to decide when to worm- Nematodirus is the only roundworm with very little resistance to white drenches so we recommended using a white drench. A faecal sample can be taken 7 days after treatment to check for resistance.

Adult sheep should be resistant to Nematodirus provided they have been previously exposed.

Worming Ewes- At Tupping

Historically ewes have been wormed at tupping. Healthy adult sheep should have a strong acquired resistance to worms so this shouldn't be necessary. A worm egg count would be recommended prior to treatment if you are concerned about worms in your adult ewes and if issues are occurring then we need to look further into flock health, as there is likely to be another issue present such as trace element deficiency or an iceberg disease.

It is recommended that only lean, immature or clinically affected ewes are wormed at tupping.

Unnecessary treatment of ewes at this time promotes anthelmintic resistance as it leads to a long period of reproductive advantage to any resistant worms left behind following treatment.

The exception to this rule is Haemonchus- *see below for more information on this.*

Worming ewes- At Turn Out

Around the time of lambing, a ewe's immunity wanes; this is known as the PPRI (Peri-parturient relaxation of immunity), this occurs from 2-4 weeks pre lambing until 6-8 weeks post lambing. During this time the ewes faecal egg count will rise, which leads to increased pasture contamination.

There is a fine line between reducing pasture contamination so reducing worm burden in lambs and increasing the risk of development of resistance.

The recommended approach is to either:

- Leave a proportion of ewes untreated (singles and good condition twins) *or*….
- Treat early in the post lambing period with a shorter acting wormer such as a levamisole or ivermectin to ensure that ewes get reinfected before their immunity is fully restored at the end of the PPI.

Pale mucous membranes in haemonchus

Haemonchus

Haemonchus contortus, commonly known as the Barbers Pole worm, is a slightly different case. Ewes do not develop resistance to this, so farms where this worm is present may need to give an additional treatment to ewes in late summer.

As this worm is a blood sucker, rather than causing scours you will see signs of anaemia in the flock. Ewes and lambs appear tired and unable to keep up with the rest of the flock and you may see cases of sudden death. On examination the eyes and mucous membranes appear pale. Another clinical sign is bottle jaw, so Haemonchus is sometimes confused with fluke.

It is easy to diagnose via postmortem examination as the worms are visible in the abomasum, where a very high worm egg count tends to be seen.

If you are concerned about Haemonchus in your flock, then drop a faecal sample from adult ewes into the practice from mid to late summer and we can have a look.

Unlike the other roundworms, Haemonchus is responsive to Closantel so this can be used to treat ewes and avoid selecting for resistance in other species of worm.

Treatment of Lambs

Aside from Nematiodirus, the other species of worm can be diagnosed by faecal egg count. So, following your early treatment with a white drench for Nematodirus we would recommend regular faecal egg counting to see if lambs need treatment. This avoids overtreatment, which will not only save money on unnecessary treatment, but also avoids selecting for resistant worms. If sheep are treated unnecessarily then any worms which are resistant to the anthelmintic used are left behind and have a reproductive advantage.

Members of our flock health club get unlimited faecal egg counts included in the package- for more information give the office a ring.

Testing for Resistance

Many farms may have issues with resistance without being aware of a problem. Once 20% of the worm population is resistant, productivity will be affected. Clinical signs such as scour will not be seen until a much larger proportion of the population is resistant.

It is easy to test for resistance on your farm using a post treatment faecal egg count. It is important that a sample is taken prior to worming to know that worms are present. A post treatment sample can then confirm if resistance is present. The time post treatment for the sample to be taken depends on the wormer used:

- White and clear drenches- 14-16 days
- Yellow drenches- 7 days.

The sooner we are aware of a resistance issue the more likely we are to be able to use strategic treatment to get on top of the issue before losses occur.

Sheep Discussion Group

Thank you to everyone who came along to the January get together for our new sheep discussion group in conjunction with Farm Consultancy Group. It was great to see so many there. The next meeting will be a 'Post Lambing Debrief' benchmarking meeting. Attached is a data collection form. If you could fill this in as accurately as possible following lambing and send it over to me that would be great- the more data we have the more interesting these meetings tend to be! The meeting will take place on Tuesday 28th April- more details to follow.

All the best, Sarah