



Farm news

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An update on sheep lameness

Have you got lame sheep? In reality, most farmers do – so if you were truthful and answered yes – you aren't alone! What's important is being realistic as to how many you have and having a lameness control plan to tackle lameness in your flock.

In 2011 the Farm Animal Welfare Committee set national flock lameness targets of under 5% by 2016 and under 2% by the end of 2021. In 2020 a nationwide study set the national level at 3.2% – so lots of good work has been done by farmers and vets, but more work is needed to hit the final target!^[1]

In a Farmers Weekly study of 400 sheep farmers 87% stated lameness as a concern in their flock.

Table 1 shows the financial impact of lameness, and when we ran an in-house vets' meeting to discuss sheep lameness, it's fair to say the costs surprised some of the team too!

Impact of Lameness: The costs.^[2]

Treatment costs: **£4.40** / affected ewe including labour cost

Control costs: **£12.00** / affected ewe

Production cost: **£79.00** / affected ewe

Total:

£89.80 / affected ewe

(e.g.) 10% prevalence: **£8.98** / animal

(**£26,940,000** nationally)

What are the main areas to act on?

The 5 Point Plan was introduced in 2014^[3] after a trial on several farms including the FAI's 1000-ewe flock. In this flock, lameness (a score of 1 or higher on the Warwick Scale) reduced from 19% at the start to 10% at the end of year 1 and under 2% at the end of year 2, after all 5 sections were implemented together.

The plan was designed to have all 5 areas used synergistically and often farmers who fail to see any change in their lameness levels after developing a lameness control plan struggle because they are only acting on one or two areas of the plan.

Using the 5 steps together in varying amounts creates a 'margin of safety' to protect against a strong challenge (e.g. a very wet winter).



The 2020 survey^[1] also found that, of 532 sheep flocks, the top contributory reasons for a failure to control or reduce lameness were;

- Trimming lame sheep – 52% respondents trimmed lame sheep, 20% trimmed routinely
- Keeping an open flock
- Having no control measures to reduce transmission (67.9% didn't do any 'avoid' measures)

The same study also found that 90% of farmers who started vaccinating against footrot, reported a 'major' or 'moderate' improvement in flock lameness levels.

Will vaccinating save me money?

"Footvax seems expensive" must be one of the main things farmers nationwide say as to why they don't do it. However, now we know the financial impact of a single lame sheep, it's easy to show the potential benefits of vaccinating if implemented correctly alongside other parts of a plan. This example uses a 300-ewe flock, with 10% of the ewes being lame.

Potential Vaccination savings:

(300 ewe flock, 10% prevalence)

£89.80/ewe affected = £2,694/year

Footvax @ **£1.08** / dose

Primary course & 6 month booster = **3 doses/ewe**

900 doses = **£972**

Potential savings of: **£1,722**

How can we work with you further on lameness control?

Some of the team have undertaken the Sheep Lameness Reduction Advisor training course and can come out to do lameness reduction advice visits. On these we work through the 5 point plan questionnaire with you to produce a lameness reduction plan for the year ahead.

We can also lameness score your flock, provide bespoke advice on vaccination and footbath products as well as discuss standard treatment protocols for infectious lameness.

[1] - C.Best et al., 2020. [2] - Lameness Reduction Advisor Training Course, 2020. [3] - <https://www.faifarms.com/lameness5pointplan/>

For more information call our practice on **01332 294929**
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One man's meat is another man's poison...

...or in this case, one animal's profit is another animal's poison!

Kexxtone boluses are designed to be given to cows and heifers 3-4 weeks prior to their expected calving date with the aim of reducing the incidence of ketosis in at-risk animals (at-risk animals are SOFT - sick, old, fat, twins!).

Kexxtone does an excellent job when used correctly, and acts by shifting the balance of bacteria in the rumen in favour of bacteria that produce propionate, the glucose precursor.

However, monensin (the active ingredient in Kexxtone) is extremely toxic to dogs, causing neurological and muscular symptoms. Muscle weakness is often first noticed in the hind legs, but then progresses to the respiratory and heart muscles. Seizures may occur and death can follow quickly. I saw a number of cases of monensin toxicity in farm dogs when I worked in New Zealand, as many farmers fed their calves on pellets containing monensin. It's a very unpleasant way for a dog to die.

Monensin-medicated calf pellets aren't used in the UK, but there have been cases where dogs have been affected after chewing either unused Kexxtone boluses or boluses that had been regurgitated by treated cows. Dogs can access these boluses if they live on the farm or are walking on footpaths across farm fields. Please do take care when using Kexxtone in your cattle and ensure that any regurgitated boluses are recovered and either re-administered or disposed of safely. Every bolus has a unique identification number, so any boluses that are regurgitated can be re-administered to the correct cow. They should not be discarded into slurry stores as this carries the risk of a damaged bolus appearing on pasture.

As well as dogs, horses, other equines and guinea fowl are particularly sensitive to Kexxtone and the same precautions should apply to these species.

Signs of the times

The marketing team at IVC Evidensia have produced these signs to help farmers tackle the issue of dog walkers not picking up after their canine companions when on public footpaths through livestock grazing. We're offering these signs free of charge to farmers who are experiencing this problem, and we hope they will help to educate owners. They are A4, made from recyclable material and have pre-drilled holes. If you'd like one or more of these signs, please contact us at the practice.



Surveillance update: Severe Summer Scour Syndrome and Idiopathic Necrotising Enteritis

The Cattle Expert Group have asked vets and farmers to be on the lookout for two diseases which might be encountered over the next two to three months.

Severe Summer Scour Syndrome has been recognised since 2018. This is a syndrome of diarrhoea and rapid loss of condition, sometimes with ulcers in the mouth and oesophagus, affecting first season grazing dairy calves. A high percentage of a group tends to be affected. Clinical signs begin within a month of turnout to grass. The disease is unresponsive to treatment and in most cases recognised bacterial, parasitic and viral causes have not been detected.

Idiopathic Necrotising Enteritis most commonly affects suckler calves of 6 to 12 weeks old. The main presenting signs are also diarrhoea (often grey colour) and oral ulceration; ulceration of the small intestine is characteristically identified post-mortem. Occasionally, affected calves also show respiratory signs, high temperatures or sudden death. Blood testing may indicate profoundly low white blood cell levels. The disease doesn't tend to affect many calves within a group, but the fatality rate is high for calves that are affected.

If you think your dairy or beef calves may be showing signs of either of these diseases, please do call one of the vets to discuss it. As for many diseases, it is important to investigate these cases early in the course of the disease. Free of charge testing is available for appropriate cases, following discussion with a Veterinary Investigation Officer at one of the VI centres.

New enhanced flexibility from Bovilis® Rotavec® Corona



We are pleased that the UK's leading calf scour vaccine, Bovilis® Rotavec® Corona is becoming even more flexible as its in-use shelf life is increasing from 8 hours to 28 days after the vial has been broached!

This advancement, detailed on the new Bovilis® Rotavec® Corona SPC, will give greater usage flexibility and reduced potential wastage for UK cattle producers who are looking to boost colostrum quality.

- Bovilis® Rotavec® Corona should be stored upright & refrigerated (2-8 °C) both before and after broaching.
- Broached vials will be able to be used once more during the next 28 days after the first vaccination event & then discarded.
- Use of excellent aseptic technique & a multi-dose applicator to minimise vaccine contamination & excessive broaching is recommended.

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