



WORM CONTROL IN SHEEP

INTRODUCTION

Roundworm infestations in the gut represent one of the most common causes of production loss in UK sheep flocks. Most farmers treat their flocks repeatedly with wormers in an attempt to control the disease. Unfortunately, repeatedly worming sheep has led to the development of resistant worms that cannot be killed by wormers. The type of wormer, the dose, the time of year and which sheep are wormed on the farm are all important factors which affect the resistance of worms to wormers. This is why a properly thought out worm control plan could improve profitability and minimise worm resistance on your farm.

Adult sheep generally have good immunity to worms, with the exception of ewes around lambing time (the stress of ewes at lambing time affects their natural immunity resulting in worm eggs being shed onto the pasture in much greater numbers at this time). Ewes should only be wormed once a year at lambing time; this will reduce the number of eggs on the pasture so that there are less for lambs to pick up.

Lambs have little resistance to worms in their first grazing season but this develops with time. Strategic worming of lambs with the correct wormer is essential to maximise profitability.

WORMERS (ANTHELMINTICS) AND RESISTANCE

There is a heavy reliance on the use of anthelmintics to control worms in livestock. Wormers can be divided into distinct chemical groups depending on their mode of action:

- **Benzimidazoles** (1-BZ) – white drenches
- **Levamisoles** (2-LM) – yellow drenches
- **Macrocyclic Lactones** (3-ML) – clear drenches and injections
- **Monepantel** (4-AD) – orange drench
- **Multi-actives** (5-SI) – purple drench (e.g. Startect Dual Active)



Worms resistant to one drug in a chemical group will be resistant to others in the same group (e.g. a farm may have resistance to all white wormers). However, many farms now have worm populations resistant to more than one group. Once worms are resistant, they stay resistant, even if that group of wormer is not used for some time. Rotating the wormer group each year offers some protection against development of resistance.

The main factors in the development of resistance are over-use and under-dosing. A proper plan can result in use of less wormer on your farm and a decreased rate of development of resistance. Sheep should be dosed according to the weight of the heaviest animals in the group. You should also check that your dosing gun is calibrated correctly.



QUARANTINE

Quarantine treatments of purchased stock aim to prevent introduction of resistant worms. Please speak to one of the vets to discuss the most suitable quarantine treatment for your farm. Examples include:

- Levamisole (2nd generation) at the same time as an Avermectin (3rd generation)
- Use a 4th generation Monepantel (orange) or 5th generation Startect Dual Active (purple).

FAECAL WORM EGG COUNTS (FWEC)

Use of faecal worm egg counts takes the guess-work out of deciding when to worm. They can provide a quick, easy and cost-effective way of quantifying the level of worms on the farm allowing more accurate timing of treatments. This allows improved control of disease and can limit over-use, slowing development of resistance.

Faecal egg counts can also be used to test if wormers are working as well as they should. Collect a faecal sample 14 days after worming to assess how well the wormer is working.

TARGET WORMING

To minimise the use of wormers in lambs unnecessarily, it is useful to target worming to specific groups of lambs. Treating only the lighter lambs (triplets/poor-doers etc) and any showing signs of disease (scour/mucky backsides) can help reduce the use of wormer on your farm. Target worming in combination with FWEC is the most cost effective and responsible way to worm lambs.

SUMMARY

Availability of mixtures of products, and the need to treat for other diseases such as fluke and scab at the same time complicates control, but can all be integrated in to the plan. There is no “one-size-fits-all” worm control programme and rarely do we achieve that “gold standard”. There is just a list of principals that we try to follow to achieve a practical and realistic solution for many different situations. Please contact your vet to discuss the best worming strategy for your farm.



KEY POINTS

Ewes should only need worming once a year at lambing time.

Lambs may need regular worming throughout the summer

Rotation of wormer groups reduces the risk of resistance on your farm

Quarantine worming programmes help minimise the risk of introducing resistant worms onto your farm

Faecal worm egg counts – to see if lambs need worming and to check if wormer has worked

Don't under dose - check dosing gun is calibrated correctly

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