

To Worm or Not To Worm – Pooled Faecal Egg Counts – July 2013

Deciding upon the correct timing of anthelmintic treatment proves very difficult for livestock farmers but is essential to reduce the risk of gastrointestinal parasitism adversely affecting lamb growth rate and costing you money. Too frequent drenching may select for resistant strains of gastrointestinal parasites (see SCOPS recommendations), drench too late and long term parasite damage to the gut will have occurred and lamb growth rates are considerably reduced for weeks to months later.

In general, if lambs are to be dosed and moved to safe pasture (e.g. silage aftermath) at weaning, they should be allowed to carry some anthelmintic-susceptible worms over onto the new pasture to avoid heavy selection for anthelmintic resistance.

For example, a proportion of the strongest lambs (perhaps around 10 per cent) could be left untreated, or the lambs allowed to graze the contaminated paddock for several days after treatment before moving to safe grazing (unless a persistent anthelmintic is used), in line with SCOPS guidelines.



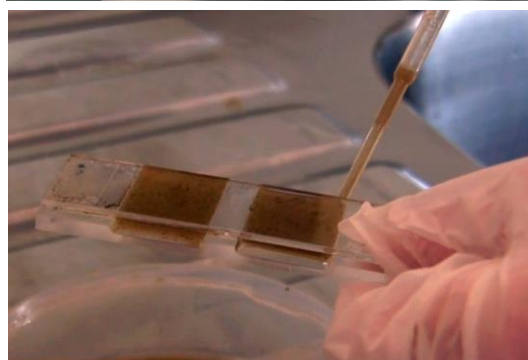
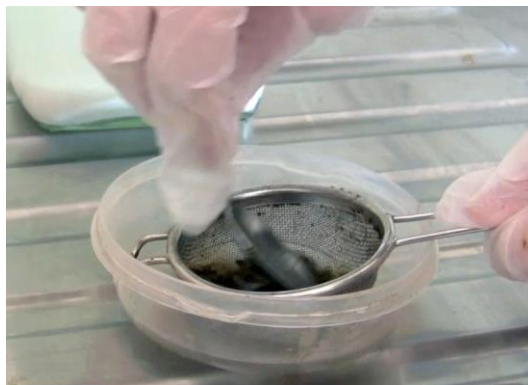
Lamb faecal worm egg counts can be used to help determine whether dosing is required, particularly if clean pasture is not available post-weaning.

During grazing of silage aftermaths, the timing of the next anthelmintic treatment should be based upon a mean worm egg count of faeces samples collected after the lambs have been gathered into a corner of the field. Pooling approximately 10 equal-sized faecal samples into a polythene bag is recommended. With experience a pooled faecal WEC need only take 2-3 minutes to count and can save many hours unnecessary work gathering and dosing lambs.

Your veterinary practice will determine the average worm egg count for each pooled sample and advise accordingly taking into account the detailed knowledge of each farm's management system.

The average worm egg will help your vet to decide whether anthelmintic treatment is necessary or should be delayed until after another sample in 10-14 days.

Unnecessary anthelmintic treatments also accelerate the appearance of anthelmintic resistance of your farm.



The potential benefits of pooled faecal worm egg counts are:

- A detailed knowledge of the parasite burden in both ewes and lambs on your farm throughout the year
- Anthelmintic treatments are only administered when necessary.
- Potentially fewer treatments saving time and money
- Selection pressure for resistant strains is reduced with fewer treatments.
- The potential for greater growth rates and earlier marketing increasing profits

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