

SLASH THE COSTS OF SHEEP LAMENESS

The drier late summer months are a good time to implement a flock lameness reduction programme and slash the costs of this debilitating disease. A lame ewe is estimated to cost around £89.80 per affected ewe in reduced performance, longer finishing times, additional labour and treatment¹.

Use of the unique FOOTVAX[®] vaccine as part of the industry supported five-point lameness reduction plan can help cut these costs. The five-point plan builds flock resilience to disease, reduces the infection challenge on the farm and establishes immunity. The result is a significant reduction in the number of lame sheep on the farm.

Vaccination with FOOTVAX[®] is an aid to preventing lameness in a flock by stimulating immunity to (and reducing lesions caused by) *Dichelobacter nodosus*, the bacteria causing footrot. Vaccination should be on a whole flock basis and timed to coincide with times of high disease risk on the farm.



For more detailed advice on how to implement the five-point plan in your flock, contact the surgery for further information.

References:

1. ADAS. Economic Impact of Health and Welfare Issues in Beef Cattle and Sheep in England (2013)

Use medicines responsibly. For more information visit: www.noah.co.uk/responsible

Footvax™ is only available from your animal health product prescriber or veterinary surgeon from whom advice should be sought. Footvax contains ten strains of inactivated *Dichelobacter nodosus* with an oil adjuvant. Legal category: POM-VPS. Footvax is the property of Intervet International B.V. or affiliated companies or licensors and is protected by copyrights, trademark and other intellectual property laws. Copyright © 2016 Intervet International B.V. All rights reserved. Further information is available from: MSD Animal Health, Walton Manor, Walton, Milton Keynes MK7 7AJ. Tel: 01908 685685 • vet-support.uk@merck.com • www.msd-animal-health.co.uk

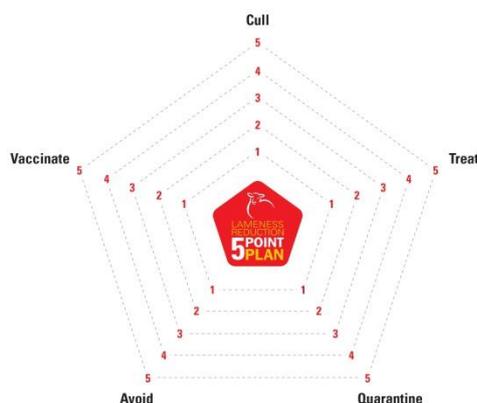
PINPOINT YOUR SHEEP LAMENESS MANAGEMENT WEAKNESSES

You now have a straightforward way of evaluating the effectiveness of your sheep lameness control strategy, thanks a useful new flock assessment tool.

The practical 'Lameness Control Planner' from MSD Animal Health gives you a simple, yet highly visual 'where are you now' method of identifying whether your lameness management protocol is unbalanced in any way.

The assessment tool allows you to score current farm practice within each of the five points that make up the Five-Point sheep lameness reduction plan: culling; treatment; quarantine; avoidance and vaccination (see figure 1).

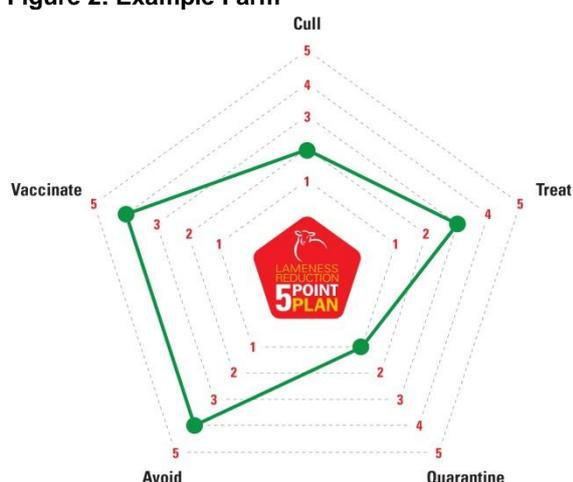
Figure 1: Five-Point Plan Scoring Matrix



Higher scores (out of five) show you are doing well in those areas of the Five-Point plan. Lower scores highlight the weaknesses and the areas you should focus on in future.

In the example shown below (figure 2), two out of the five action points have been carried out well, but the lameness issue has not been reduced as much as was hoped, causing frustration. The outcome pentagon explains why, highlighting weaker implementation in terms of the culling and quarantine practices on the farm.

Figure 2: Example Farm



This shows that if you now focus on improving culling and quarantine practices, plus a little extra attention to the treatment protocol, then the lameness situation within the flock should improve significantly.

Keen to find out more? Contact the farm vets on 01729 823538 who can help you work through the lameness control planner for your flock.

VACCINATION ALLEVIATES THE FRUSTRATION OF SHEEP LAMENESS

Last autumn the frustrations of continuously treating lame sheep got too much for Worcestershire farmer Richard Smith and he decided to go all out to get on top of the problem once and for all.

Since then he has chosen to vaccinate all of his breeding stock against footrot and has witnessed a sharp decline in lameness, which he hopes will be translated into improved foot health in new season lambs.

“I was always having a few lame sheep and I seemed to be using antibiotics all the time. I estimate about 5-10% of ewes were lame, but since vaccinating lameness is down to 2% or maybe even less. The ones that were lame are also getting better quicker,” says Richard.



Vaccinating stock has been part of an overall strategy to reduce lameness, which uses all parts of the national Five Point Plan to control lameness (see box). This plan is designed to reduce overall disease pressure from infectious lameness and improve flock resistance to the disease through vaccination.

Richard runs 500 ewes at Welland Lodge, Upton-upon-Severn. 350 Mules and Suffolk cross ewes lamb in March. These are put to a Charollais or Suffolk tup, with the best Suffolk cross

Mules kept as replacements. 150 Cheviots are put to a Bluefaced Leicester and lamb in April. A flock of 20 Bluefaced Leicester ewes also produce about 8-10 breeding rams a year for home use.

The farm experiences particular issues with scald in lambs in May when stocking rates and infection pressure are high. At this time, around 10-15% of lambs have historically been lame. Richard regularly footbaths with formalin and is quick to treat infected ewes and lambs using injectable antibiotic and foot spray. However, in the past, he has been unhappy with the results.

“Gathering the ewes and lambs, treating them and putting them through the footbath puts a lot of stress on the sheep. You lose grazing time and lambs can get separated. I also don’t feel we got much out of it for the man power,” he says.

And with all lambs sold live weight at a 40kg minimum at 16 weeks old, this lameness and subsequent impact on growth rates is something Richard can ill afford.

“I’ve always been keen on controlling lameness as I hate seeing it. And the weight just drops off lame lambs. They don’t thrive and they take longer to get ready (for market). It’s especially a problem in early lambs as you can miss the peak in the May/June trade.”

An extra two weeks in finishing time at that time of year can result in a £10 a head dip in prices. Lame ewes also won’t milk as well, which will have a negative impact on lamb growth rates.

Richard says buying replacements from market has traditionally posed a challenge in terms of introducing diseases such as lameness. Despite his best attempts to quarantine stock, space limitations and combined handling events have also increased the risk of disease spread.

“In the past, we’ve brought in yearling ewes that may have been OK, but my existing flock could have contaminated them (with infectious lameness). It meant I was chasing it all the time,” he explains.

However, having decided to rear his own replacements and only buy in a small number of rams, Richard is more committed to improving flock disease status. As a result, he vaccinated all of the early lambing flock against footrot last October. The later lambing flock were then vaccinated just before Christmas.



Footrot

“I was surprised how quickly it had an effect. It seems to have worked very effectively. It cost 83p a sheep, but I say that if anything works it’s cheap. I’d gladly do it again if needed, but at the moment I think I’ll only need to do it once per year.”

As part of an ongoing lameness control strategy, Richard has also decided to implement a more vigorous culling strategy for chronically lame sheep. These sheep represent a significant source of infection to other animals. As a result, Richard will cull animals that need treating for lameness more than once.

“I’ve culled for lameness in the past, but perhaps not quite as hard as I should. I am going to buy an EID reader, which will mean I can keep better record of repeat offenders and use it as a tool to control lameness,” he says.

These records will also be linked to offspring so that any lambs from ewes that will be culled for lameness will not be kept for breeding.

“Going forward, by keeping records, getting rid of problem ewes and selecting tups that are less susceptible to footrot, I think the flock will improve. My ultimate aim is to eradicate lameness,” says Richard.

Any purchased stock will continue to be quarantined and vaccinated for diseases, including footrot. To prevent spread of infection, handling facilities in the barn are on a concrete standing, which is regularly cleaned down. Disinfecting this area may also be considered in the future. When animals are run through the footbath, they are also left to stand on a dry, concrete standing areas afterwards to allow the product to dry.

All in all, Richard remains convinced of the benefits of controlling lameness. “I know lame sheep cost a lot of money. It must be costing the industry millions. If we can do all we can to eradicate it, it will benefit both the industry and the sheep. It will also help reduce antibiotic use. Vaccination is an extra tool to help with the battle against footrot and I hope one day not to have the disease at all,” he concludes.

Five Point Plan

- Culling repeat offenders
- Prompt treatment of infected animals
- Quarantining
- Preventing spread of infection
- Vaccinating

For more information or to implement a Five Point Plan please contact the farm vets at the surgery on 01729 823538.