

Llŷr Jones, Derwydd farm, Llanfihangel Glyn Myfyr, Corwen

Lameness in sheep is one of the main productivity problems in the UK sheep population. Some estimates suggest that it costs the UK sheep industry £24 million a year. It can also be well managed by following straightforward preventative and treatment measures. Lameness can cause welfare and business efficiency problems in a flock; an animal in discomfort will spend less time feeding and grazing and more time lying down and losing body condition, lowering lambing percentages as well as reducing lamb growth rates and fertility in rams.



Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis (CODD) is a relatively new lameness condition of sheep, first reported in the UK in 1997. It has been shown to have a severe impact on the welfare of affected animals. Recent surveys have shown that CODD may now affect between 35% and 53% of flocks in the UK. Llŷr Jones of Derwydd farm, Llanfihangel Glyn Myfyr, Corwen, has run the family farm since he was 19 years old. He farms 1,200 Welsh mountain ewes and with two colleagues founded Blodyn Aur, the Welsh rapeseed oil company in 2010. Llŷr identified that tackling lameness within his flock would significantly increase efficiency within his business. Llŷr comments: “Good animal welfare is key to the business and no one likes seeing lame sheep in the fields.”

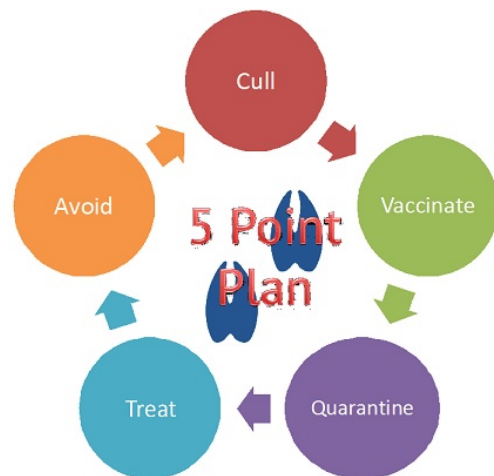
Llŷr was involved in ‘The CODD Project’ at the University of Liverpool. His farm was one of six used to study the infectious foot disease Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis (CODD). As part of the study, Llŷr’s mule flock was visited 6 times between 14th June 2012 and 31st May 2013. The purpose of the study was:

1. To investigate the amount of CODD in this flock and how this changed over time.
2. To look for risk factors for disease.
3. To determine the welfare effects of disease on the sheep through locomotion scoring.

During the course of the study period there was minimal interference with normal management and the running of the flock in order to study the dynamics and effects of the disease. At each visit, any sheep with foot lesions identified were treated as part of Llŷr’s normal treatment regime. Treatments included the use of a long acting oxytetracycline injection, oxytetracycline spray and foot trimming. Whilst foot trimming is not generally recommended for foot lesions these days, the intention was to observe and not interfere during the study period.

During each visit all the sheep were gathered and the whole flock inspected for signs of lameness. A locomotion scoring system was used to determine which sheep were lame and how severe the lameness was. All the lame sheep and a sample of the non-lame sheep were then examined in detail and data recorded. CODD lesions were classified into 5 grades. Grades 1-4 were classed as having CODD still active within the lesions and foot whereas grade 5 would have lesions caused by a previous CODD infection. The results for Llŷr’s flock were as follows:

Visit date	Estimated prevalence of active CODD
14 <sup>th</sup> June 2012	4.2
07 <sup>th</sup> August 2012	7.5
28 <sup>th</sup> September 2012	6.9
03 <sup>rd</sup> January 2013	1.2
13 <sup>th</sup> February 2013	2.0
31 <sup>st</sup> May 2013	0.6
<b>Mean prevalence</b>	<b>3.8 (95%CI: 0.6-6.9%)</b>



The Industry recommended ‘5 point action plan’ to reduce lameness (Source: HCC)

Since the study which took place almost 4 years ago, Llŷr said that lameness within the flock is still very much under control and typically throughout the year is under 2%. Llŷr continues to manage lameness by following the 5 point plan. This is designed for foot-rot and scald but CODD is also a contagious bacterial disease, which means the plan can help control it as well. “Working with your vet to identify lameness problems on your farm and using all parts of the five-point plan will help you successfully control lameness, improve welfare and importantly improve the efficiency of your business,” states Llŷr.