Flock Health Planning
Lameness

Lameness in sheep flocks can cause significant losses through reduced weight gain, metabolic diseases in pregnant ewes, reduced birth-weight of lambs, mis-mothering and poor colostrum production by ewes. Treatment costs can quickly add up in terms of both labour and veterinary medicines.

Footrot and Scald

Footrot is one of the main causes of lameness in flocks. Scald affects the skin between the claws and is caused by Fusobacterium necrophorum. Sheep get footrot when that damage to the skin allows further bacterial infection by Dichelobacter nodosus to colonise deeper layers leading to inflammation and tissue damage. Footrot spreads more easily in warm moist weather conditions and when sheep are housed. Stocking density, soil pH and breed of sheep may also affect incidence and severity.

Footrot can be prevented. If you are seeing more than 5% of a flock affected at a time; or animals have severe foot rot with horn detachment on at least 1 foot, then there is a case for looking at the whole flock control programme. Flocks will be losing money with this amount and/or severity of disease. Tackling lameness needs to be a year round approach and should be included as a key part of any flock health plan.

Once an outbreak of scald or footrot occurs the effort in the short term is rewarded by long term benefits. Ignoring a problem in May can lead to high levels of lameness and lambs not finishing by September. By that time it will be too late to do anything other than to cut losses.

Treatment and Prevention of Footrot

There is no quick and easy approach to controlling the disease. A control programme can consist of topical and injectable antibiotics, foot-bathing, vaccination, separation of infected stock and grazing rested pastures.

Lame ewes should be split from the main flock and treated as soon as welfare of the animal permits. Footrot is an infectious condition and should be treated with antibiotics. Scald cases are also likely to have footrot bacteria. Foot sprays and footbaths will kill these bacteria and prevent spread.

Make sure equipment is in good order and that feet are clean before footbathing. Remove any mudballs, clean mud from between the cleats and walk through water first if feet are dirty. Pare only where absolutely necessary as over-paring will do more harm than good. Only loose, overgrown horn should be pared. Cutting away any more can lead to soil and debris entering the hoof leading to more infections. Foot paring should be avoided in sheep treated with antibiotic for at least 24 hours (preferably 5 days). Disinfect foot trimming equipment between sheep. After paring use a foot spray or run the animals through a footbath of zinc sulphate (10% solution for at least 2 minutes) or formalin (3% solution).

If footbathing the entire flock always handle sound sheep first. Remember that high concentrations of footbathing agents can damage the skin and feet. Stand sheep on a hard surface for at least one hour after footbathing and then turn sheep onto a field that has been free of sheep for the previous 2 weeks.

Identify all sheep individually and keep records of all treatments. Sheep repeatedly lame with footrot, those that do not respond to antibiotic treatment and sheep with badly misshapen feet should be culled.

The control and prevention of footrot and scald should be part of your Flock Health Plan. Vaccination for footrot may be part of your control programme and can also be helpful in the face of an outbreak.

Further information on best practice to control Footrot and Scald in sheep can be found on the web at www.footrotinsheep.org

Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis (CODD)

Feet problems that do not respond to treatment may be infected with Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis (CODD) rather than footrot. Contact your veterinary surgeon for a diagnosis. CODD can be treated by antibiotic footbaths that are available on prescription but these should only be used if CODD is definitely present. Photos of this and other major causes of sheep lameness can be found on the University of Warwick website at http://www.warwick.ac.uk/go/sheeplameness/

Managing the risk of lameness in sheep

Lowest risk

1. Planned programme to prevent lameness - closed flock, culling of susceptible animals, vaccination as appropriate.
2. Buy in replacements from sources known to be footrot-free; Isolate replacements and returning animals; Minimise close contact.
3. Planned control programme implemented appropriately.
4. Do nothing
5. Over-enthusiastic paring of affected animals

Highest risk

Caiff y Ganolfan Datblygu Cig Eidion a Defaid, a gaiff ei rhedeg gan Hybu Cig Cymru, ei reoli gan Lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru fel rhan o Cyswllt Ffermio

The Beef and Sheep Development Centre, run by Hybu Cig Cymru, is managed by the Welsh Assembly Government as part of Farming Connect.

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Flock health planning – lameness decisions

Is there a problem?

Date: _____

Condition	Cases – this year	Culled – this year	Target for next year
Scald			
Footrot			
CODD			
Other lamenesses			

Is any action planned? Yes/No

Planned action	Target groups	Dates	Product
Foot-bathing			
Foot-trimming			
Vaccination			
Antibiotics			

Other decisions

Record all cases of lameness and culling for lameness?	Yes/No
Treat and isolate sheep with footrot immediately.	Yes/No
Keep close contact between sheep (gathering, etc) to a minimum.	Yes/No
Disinfect foot trimming equipment between sheep.	Yes/No
Remove sheep with footrot before housing and pen separately.	Yes/No
Put sheep on pasture free from livestock for at least 2 weeks after footbathing, foot trimming etc.	Yes/No
Keep gathering areas clean and tidy.	Yes/No
Move troughs, creep feeders, etc regularly.	Yes/No
Avoid the regular use of gateways etc. and avoid poorly drained land during risk periods.	Yes/No
Prevent excessive spillage of water from water troughs.	Yes/No
Provide housed sheep with dry bedding regularly, especially around feeding racks/troughs, water troughs and other dirty areas.	Yes/No
Train staff not to over-trim feet (consider only trimming overgrown feet).	Yes/No

Replacement policy

Avoid selecting replacements born to ewes with a history of lameness.	Yes/No
Cull repeat offenders and sheep not responding to treatment.	Yes/No
Buy in replacements from as few sources as possible and from known sources	Yes/No
Isolate replacements and sheep returning to your holding for at least 3 weeks, inspect feet regularly	Yes/No

For more information visit www.footrotinsheep.org

Flock health planning lameness review date: _____