Lameness In Sheep - meeting summary

Sponsored by Elanco.

The first talk was from Andrew Sawyer of Alnothumbria Vets. He aimed to answer three important questions.

Which diseases commonly cause lameness?

Overgrown toes
Scald/Strip
Footrot – starts in between the toes and moves outwards, under-running the hoof horn
CODD – Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis starts at the coronary band before eventually shedding the outer hoof. Often, there is a large area of hair loss on the skin above the hoof. Lameness rates of 30-40% are not uncommon when it first enters the flock. Still reasonably unusual here in North Devon.

Toe granuloma – usually the result of foot paring too hard and drawing blood.

Foot abscess
Pedal joint abscess

Why is it important to differentiate one cause from another?

Different causes require different approaches, both at the individual sheep level and at the flock level. For example, non-contagious causes such as toe granuloma or abscesses won’t respond to whole flock antibiotic injections or footbathing.

Footvax can be highly effective when you have footrot, but is virtually useless if your main issue is CODD.

CODD is unlikely to respond to long-acting Oxytetracycline injections. Micotil or antibiotic foot-bathing are likely to give a better response.

Scald will certainly respond to antibiotic foot-bathing, but this using is the proverbial “sledgehammer to crack a nut”. Use Oxytetracycline sprays and/or zinc sulphate foot-bathing to treat scald and reserve the antibiotic baths for CODD where there are few other alternatives.

Antibiotic treatment is useless for pedal joint abscesses but digit amputation works well.

What are the risk factors for lameness?

- Main risk factors for infection – damage to the skin between claws by persistent moisture and mechanical trauma
- Differences in foot conformation exist between breeds – how good can you ever expect a Suffolk ram’s feet to look?
- As his trial results demonstrated, excellent biosecurity is essential to keep lameness rates low.

Costs associated with lame sheep

The audience very quickly identified labour as one of the biggest costs. When asked to put a figure on the overall cost per ewe per year, the range of suggestions was from £5 to £20.

Trialling Whole Flock Micotil treatment

Andrew presented results from his ongoing trial using vet-administered Micotil injections as a whole flock treatment. His initial trial consisted of 3 small flocks, using a slightly different technique on each.

Farm 1
Flock Details: 60 ewes mixed pedigree Texels, Blueface Leicester and commercial Cheviots, lambing early March inside. 40% lame sheep at start of trial.

Treatment: Three weeks after lambing the ewes and rams were foot pared, and given 1.5ml of Micotil under the skin. The ewes then were moved to clean pasture. The lambs were not treated.

Results: Within three weeks the only lame sheep was a ewe with a condition called Kangaroo gait. No lame sheep were reported over the summer. Replacements have been treated with Micotil as they entered the flock. By August 2010 - four lame sheep were treated, all had foot abscesses. By October 2010 Scald and Footrot seen introduced with 10 untreated ewes.

Farm 2
Flock details: 240 pedigree Texel ewes, 60 ram lambs, 70 ewe lambs and a few stock rams run on two holdings. Lambing indoors from 20th March. 10% lameness in the flock and regular treatment, paring and foot bathing done throughout the summer.

Treatment: The rams, ram and ewe lambs were foot pared plus given Micotil just prior to the start of lambing. The ewes were injected with micotil whilst in individual pens in the lambing shed. Their feet were not pared. Some of the
fields used post-lambing were clean. In October purchased stock rams were isolated and treated with Micotil before entering the flock.

**Results:** During the summer of 2009 there were 3 lame ewes, one with Kangaroo gait, one with very long toes and one arthritic. No foot bathing was carried out and the lambs remained sound. There were no lame rams for the Kelso ram sale.

- During spring 2010 there were 4 lame ewes at lambing time each had soil packed in the white line and a foot abscess. There have been a few lambs with scald that have rapidly responded to Oxytetracycline spray.
- By January 2011 still no footbathing or foot trimming of any sheep. 1 bottle of Oxytet used on any lame sheep.
- By August 2011 a few more lame sheep, the farmer blames injuries at clipping and another bottle of Oxytet used.

**Farm Three**

**Flock details:** 193 Texel cross ewes lambing end of April at grass. Historically there has been a high incidence of lameness, slightly less since delaying lambing.

**Treatment:** March '09 all ewes and rams were examined. They were injected with micotil and no other foot treatment given. At that time there were only 7 lame ewes. The ewes were run back onto the fields they had come from.

**Results:** July '09 all sheep were examined and two were lame with white line abscesses. By Dec '09 the farmer reported there was still no sign of footrot or CODD with only the odd lame ewe from other causes. August 2010 the farmer still happy with the results. By Dec 2010 still very good results and the farmer realised that there had been very few lame lambs.

**In summary,** treating all adult sheep with Micotil had a dramatic effect on rates of contagious lameness. It had no effect on abscesses or over-trimming injuries. On one farm, the reduction in lameness has persisted for 2½ years. On another, lameness rates only increased after non-treated sheep were introduced. Interestingly, flock treatment of the adult sheep also seemed to decrease the incidence of strip/scald seen in the subsequent lamb crop. We don’t yet have a good explanation for this!

When Andrew presented early results to his own farm clients, he had 10 more volunteers for the trial. Not every farm since then has had the same success rates, but on the whole, it seems beneficial. Sometimes the lack of success was merely due to the farmer having unrealistic expectations. Micotil will not prevent 100% of lameness.

The key lessons learnt from the trials so far are:
- Inspect the flock to assess the cause of lameness before treating.
- When treating a whole flock, take time and care especially when the ewes have a full fleece. One missed ewe could re-infect the flock.
- Reassess the flock after 2 to 4 weeks and retreat any lame sheep with a full dose of Micotil.
- Isolate and treat any sheep entering the flock.
- Treatment can work really well but poor biosecurity is a big problem and will lead to breakdowns.
- Could be regarded as a tool to move a flock problem to an individual ewe problem.

Andrew suggested that an interesting trial on a farm-by-farm basis might be to treat all the rams pre-tupping with Micotil and monitor lameness rates during the joining period. It should be kept in mind that as soon as the rams join the un-treated ewes, they will be exposed once more to the footrot bacteria. The Micotil dose lasts approximately 2 weeks.

**Special offer on Micotil injections**

We are introducing a new service if you wish to trial treating your entire flock, or your ram flock with Micotil. Charges will be as follows

- £1.80 per ml + VAT for drugs
- £1 + VAT per animal (minimum £20 + VAT)

Visit fee if applicable – we can inject ram groups in the trailer at Bridge House or Mullacott.

e.g. a flock of 200 ewes at 60kgs (including 6 rams at 100kgs) would cost approximately £605 + VAT, working out to be approximately £3 per ewe. This is well within even the most conservative estimates from farmers of what lameness costs them. Whilst we are not claiming that this will totally eliminate lameness from your flock, we believe that this will be a very cost-effective treatment.

Please phone and speak to Neil or Jenny S. to discuss this offer.

**Available for September**

Footvax:
250 doses £175 + VAT

**Flukicides for autumn fluke treatments**

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<th>Product</th>
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<td>Fasinex 100</td>
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**Next Sheep Farmer meeting planned for lunchtime on Wednesday 21st Sept**

Carol Davis from Signet will talk on

- how to use EBVs to select your rams next year.
- Jenny from Charter Vets will talk on
  - diseases of the pregnant ewe
  - maximising lamb survival.

Hot buffet and refreshments will follow.