

Parasite Control in Sheep

Worm burdens in sheep (and any animal, in fact) can cause ill thrift, poor weight gain, and in severe cases, death. With an increasing resistance to deworming products, what can we do to both keep our sheep healthy and minimize resistance?

There is growing awareness of antibiotic resistance in both the human and animal health sectors, and the same applies to our deworming products. When used correctly, we can manage to have a sustainable control of parasites. This can be done by the following principles:

1. Ensuring the product you are using is effective
 - If you use a drench gun, calibrate it and ensure it is dispensing the correct dose prior to administering it to your sheep.
 - Dose to the correct weight of your sheep.
 - Ensure the product works on your farm (some farms may be seeing resistance if a single wormer is used for a prolonged period). This can be done by having a veterinarian perform a Faecal Egg Reduction Test (also known as a Drench Test). Faecal samples are taken pre- and post-worming and efficacy of your worming product is determined by your veterinarian.
2. Management and monitoring can reduce the need for deworming
 - Faecal Worm Egg Counts (FWEC) are a very useful tool for helping determine if a flock (or a certain age group of a flock) need to be wormed. In general, adult sheep should not be over wormed as they have competent immune systems that can cope with worm burdens. Thin body condition sheep are less likely to cope with worms, so nutrition also plays a role.
3. Avoid introducing worms to your farm
 - All new stock brought onto a farm should be quarantined. Ideally, new stock should be kept separate for 28 days from home raised stock.
4. Minimize selection of resistant worms
 - New research indicates that dosing and moving sheep to clean pasture selects for resistant worms (as any worms that are not killed have no competition). It is better to either a) not worm your whole flock--use FWEC to help determine who needs to be wormed or b) drench your sheep and keep them on the same "dirty" pasture to "dilute" the worms.

A good rule of thumb: when you worm your sheep, you are not treating the sheep, you are treating the worms! If you do not treat them effectively, it can lead to dewormer resistance.

If you would like to learn more, please call the clinic at 403-742-3338.