**Liver Fluke – A Summer Problem?**

Liver fluke control is now a year round issue and the roots of next autumn and winter’s problems are already being established. Only early intervention and positive management actions will help stem the tide of what looks like being another challenging season.

**So why is 2014 looking set to be another bad year?**

The mild, wet winter meant that a lot of liver fluke survived through to spring and these have been picked up by grazing animals since turnout. Once ingested, it takes 10-12 weeks for the immature liver fluke to work their way to the liver, mature and start laying eggs. It is these eggs which are shed in dung that are the problem. They infect mud snails, the intermediate host, where there is a vast multiplication and lead to a huge population of infective liver fluke (metacercaria) on the pasture. The process which takes the egg to an infective stage can take as little as 6-7 weeks given warm, damp conditions. The result is a population explosion on high risk pastures. When these are grazed by animals we will see losses due to acute liver fluke infection, which is the result of damage due to mass migration of immature liver fluke from the gut to the liver.

**What can we do about it?**

1. **Talk about Liver Fluke – ask for advice** - we need to think about liver fluke all the year round and importantly to consider actions in the late spring and summer to reduce the risks later on. We can’t afford to push it under the carpet until the autumn. We know this was the case last year; feedback from farmer meetings and discussions with Vets and SQPs suggests very few farmers took any action over the summer months.
2. **Consider Summer Adulticide Treatments\***-where there is a high risk. The aim is to reduce the number of eggs put out on to pastures and hence stem the tide of infection in the autumn. This was rarely implemented in 2013 and undoubtedly added to the weight of challenge on many farms. To establish the need for treatment, a mob faecal sample can be carried out to check for the presence of fluke eggs.
3. **Minimise high risk areas** - the sooner very wet areas are fenced off the better. Planning to avoid high risk areas also needs to start early as do any plans for using housing as part of the strategy and quarantine treatments**.**
4. **Monitor the situation** – Ask for feedback from the abattoir on every batch of sheep slaughtered. This will give an early warning of any trouble. Other on-farm monitoring tests (e.g. coproantigen and blood sampling) can also be used and SCOPS will have more details on their website soon.

\* The aim here is to use a product that only kills adult liver fluke. Where possible we want to avoid using Triclabendazole (TCBZ) closantel and nitroxynil so these are saved for when immature liver fluke are present and need to be killed. However, as the summer progresses the numbers of immature fluke generally build up so these products may become the treatment of choice. Remember the liver fluke situation will vary from farm to farm so it is essential to get a full picture before advising on the most appropriate product in each case.

*A full list of products available for sheep is attached and for cattle this can be found on* [*www.cattleparasites.org.uk*](http://www.cattleparasites.org.uk) *.*

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