



## Tackling the Threat from Liver Fluke – Top 10 Actions.

Weather conditions that favour liver fluke have continued and this looks likely to result in high numbers of the parasites on many livestock farms again this year. Last season this caught out a number of producers causing high losses and many more sheep (and cattle) in poor condition as a result of liver damage. While some of these cases have involved resistance to one of the main products used (Triclabendazole – TCBZ) many more have been due to under dosing or misunderstanding of the risk of re-infection following treatment. The bottom line is that with the challenge from liver fluke so high, sticking to traditional treatment programmes will fail to prevent them causing havoc. If we are going to minimise the impact of liver fluke this coming season it must involve some careful forward planning.

1. **Reduce contamination levels** in spring/summer by using an adulticide (see table) to kill egg laying parasites, reducing the numbers infecting the snails and subsequently on pasture for sheep and cattle to ingest.
2. **Identify high risk areas** and see if you can reduce the risk and/or avoid grazing these pastures in the late summer /autumn. Practical steps include fencing off wet areas, attending to leaking troughs and pipes, drainage or even consider housing early.
3. **Don't just assume any problems you had last year were due to resistance** to the flukicide. Simply changing the product you use could make things worse if you don't get to grips with the cause of the problem. If you suspect resistance, arrange to do a drench test, preferably a Faecal Egg Count Reduction (FECRT) with your vet.
4. **Plan to re-treat animals** if they are put back on to infected pastures. Remember that none of the flukicide products is persistent so animals will pick fluke up again immediately and may need to be treated again within 6 weeks.
5. **Make sure you understand the product choices** available to you in terms of the age of liver fluke they kill because there are big differences (see table). Don't use a combination 'fluke and worm' unless it is absolutely necessary – the chances are the correct timing of treatment required for liver fluke and worms is not the same, resulting in a compromised effectiveness for one or the other parasite.
6. **Always treat effectively.** Underdosing is a major issue, leaving parasites alive in the animal which will cause damage to the liver and encourage resistance to develop. Weigh, don't guess and be prepared to split groups if there is a wide variation in liveweight to ensure the dose rate used is accurate. Calibrate equipment regularly and get the drench over the back of the tongue.

7. **Ask for abattoir feedback on any liver rejections.** This is invaluable in getting an early warning there may be fluke around on the farm. Early action will also minimise the loss in performance caused by sub-clinical liver fluke infections.
8. **Investigate losses.** Acute liver fluke disease strikes with little if any warning because it is caused by the migration of large numbers of immature flukes to the liver, long before there are any egg laying adults around. A post mortem examination will establish whether liver fluke are involved. Watch out for other signs such as loss in body condition or poor growth rates in lambs.
9. **Quarantine all incoming stock** from potentially flukey areas for liver fluke as well as worms and sheep scab. This will take considerable planning but failure to do it could result in you importing resistant liver fluke from another farm as well as losses and/or reduced performance in the animals themselves. See options on the SCOPS website and discuss with your vet/adviser.
10. **Get help.** Don't wait until the losses are mounting up. Sit down with your vet or adviser and plan ahead in terms of actions, treatments and any monitoring that you can put in place.

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