



FLUKE SEASON: “As Bad as Expected”

Peter Baber, Chairman of SCOPS, says the recent heavy rains across the UK have maintained the high risk of liver fluke in sheep and cattle and he stressed the need for farmers to urgently contact their vet or prescriber to discuss your fluke control programme.

The SCOPS group put out a fluke alert at the end of summer warning that, due to the wet summer, the fluke risk would be high. Farmers were urged to discuss the situation on their farms with their prescriber. The fluke challenge has, as anticipated, been very high this year and the traditional treatment times are no longer applicable. Mr Baber said none of the flukicides are persistent, so the minute the stock graze fluke infested pasture again they get re-infected and fluke numbers are so high sheep may show clinical disease 4-5 weeks after treatment.

In the autumn acute disease caused by the immature fluke is most prevalent in sheep so treatments should kill these immature flukes and triclabendazole (TBZ) is the treatment of choice unless it is not effective on your farm. Resistance to some flukicides does occur but **reinfection** is more common. Another reason for drenches apparently not working is underestimating the weight of the animals, especially adult ewes. Any underestimation could make the dose inadequate and severe consequences can occur. Lesley Stubbings, of SCOPS said ‘there are very limited medicines available to kill the very young flukes. It is vital for farmers to investigate any apparent treatment failures so you can make good decisions on how to control fluke for the rest of this year and the years to come’.

Anthelmintics on their own may not be enough in very badly affected areas. If animals can be moved to any dry ground available or even housed this will help reduce the challenge the animals are receiving.

Rumen fluke has been diagnosed on some farms but, unless you have a problem diagnosed, liver fluke is still the main threat. The treatment for rumen fluke is oxclozanide, which only kills adult liver fluke, so using it at this time of year could leave your animals at risk from acute liver fluke

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