

Lameness in Grazing Cattle

One of the main problems we see over the summer in cattle at grass is lameness. Most commonly this is due to an infection caused by bacteria that live in the soil - commonly known as foul in the foot.

Foul can be treated very effectively with antibiotics, but it is also important to check that there is no underlying cause that would result in the lameness recurring. Commonly, these could include stones or other foreign bodies between the claws, or cuts caused by sharp objects such as loose wire.

Other risk factors for foul developing are poached or muddy areas, open swards with bare soil and flinty ground. Where these are unavoidable, ensure you are keeping a close eye on cattle as the sooner you detect and treat lameness the quicker it is likely to heal.

If you are struggling to get to treating lame cattle because of needing to run them in, we can help! All our vets carry Masterject dosing systems (pole syringes), which means we can often treat lame cattle directly out in the field. For more complicated cases we can sedate animals to allow us to get a closer look at the problem. This can often be a much more cost and time effective way to treat lame cattle than running a whole group in, and if done promptly then recovery times will be quicker too!

Flies

Far from just being a nuisance, flies can have a surprisingly large impact on growth, production and welfare. Research suggests flies can cause a decrease in cattle growth rates of up to 0.3kg/day, and a reduction in milk yield of up to 0.5l/day. In addition, flies also transmit a number of diseases including summer mastitis and new forest eye. In sheep, flies lay eggs on wet or dirty fleece resulting in flystrike - this is an extremely painful and unpleasant condition which can result in death if not picked up soon enough.

Our top tips for keeping flies under control this summer:

- Get fly protection on early - by doing this you can reduce the rate at which flies breed, helping to keep the population under control for the whole season. Products like Spot On or Swish are available for cattle, and for sheep options include Crovect (for prevention and treatment of fly strike) and Klik (long term prevention only).
- Keep livestock away from areas with high densities of flies, such as stagnant water and muck heaps.
- Keep on top of your worm & cocci status - as well as helping growth rates this will reduce faecal staining which attracts flies
- Keep a close eye out for fly-borne diseases and catch & treat any individuals affected by summer mastitis, new forest eye or flystrike promptly - the sooner they are treated the faster they will recover, and the less chance they will have to spread disease around the group!

Join The March to reduce Sheep Lameness

Sheep flocks often suffer from an increase in lameness during the summer months – hence the adoption of July as Lameness Month to focus on measures to bring peace of mind and prevent problems developing when the flock may not be easily accessible.

The run up to weaning is an ideal time to identify and note problems before any disease becomes more established. Check sheep's feet regularly, as sheep with early stage footrot or contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD) have been known not to appear as being lame.

At weaning time, mark any persistently lame ewes for culling, and if flock replacements are home-bred, make sure breeding is only from sound ewes or ewe lambs that have not been lame.

Most sheep lameness in the UK is caused by the bacteria *Dichelobacter nodosus*, which can appear as scald or as footrot. If allowed to progress, it causes significant discomfort and welfare concerns due to the obvious pain. Becoming more widespread is CODD, caused by a treponeme bacteria, it has a progressive nature and in its later stages can cause severe lameness.

These are the two most important causes of lameness in UK sheep; they are strongly associated in their infectivity and transmission routes. Footrot is a risk factor for CODD, so by keeping this widespread disease under control will help reduce the impact of CODD in the flock.

The development of an industry accepted framework, the FAI Five Point Plan (5PP), has established best practice for managing lameness in sheep. Across the sheep farming community there is real momentum behind the 5PP and many have confirmed that by implementing sustaining it helps to keep flock lameness incidence down to 2% or less.

Please enquire in the practice/with our vets for any further information on Sheep Lameness Month/your Five Point Plan Assessment.



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Thank you to all that have signed up to the sheep skills workshop – it is now fully booked.

Look out for news of our next farmers' meeting/workshop!