

Minimising loss of carcase value



Health practice and livestock management factsheet

- Avoiding damage to meat and offal
- Keeping sheep and cattle clean
- Controlling skin parasites to avoid damage to cattle hides and sheep skins



With slim margins for cattle and sheep it is essential that producers maximise the value of every carcase. This means avoiding deductions at the abattoir for bruising, abscesses, condemned livers, excess fat and dirty animals. This factsheet describes some of the veterinary aspects of presenting animals for slaughter in the best possible condition.

Above: An example of bottle jaw.

Avoiding damage to meat and offal

LIVER FLUKE – With up to 50% of lambs and 30% of cattle in some batches presented for slaughter showing signs of liver fluke, this is a huge challenge for the meat industry. Not only do animals perform badly when infested with fluke, but livers cannot be used for human consumption and the price is reduced markedly (40p/kg and £1/kg lower for beef and lamb liver respectively).

The mud snail, which acts as an intermediate host for this parasite, needs wet ground and temperatures of greater than 15°C, hence wet boggy ground poses a particular risk to cattle and sheep.

There are two forms of the disease, acute and chronic. Acute fluke is caused by massive numbers of immature fluke migrating across the abdomen and penetrating the liver causing haemorrhage and death. This typically occurs in late summer and in the autumn.

Chronic fluke is caused by mature fluke which live in the bile ducts causing damage to the liver and feeding off the animal. This causes the typical signs of wasting with bottle jaw and scour and is typically seen in late winter and early spring.

Various drugs target specific parts of the fluke life cycle so ask your vet to tailor the animal health plan to maximise the efficiency of the drugs for your farm.

See HCC booklet, 'Controlling Liver Fluke on Welsh Farms' for more guidance.

DOG TAPEWORMS (THIN-NECKED BLADDER WORM, SHEEP BLADDER WORM, GID AND HYDATID) – A lot of offal, especially liver, is condemned due to damage caused by the larvae of dog tapeworms. (These tapeworms are very different to the ribbon like worm segments, *Monenzia expansa* that can often be seen in the faeces of lambs. This is not considered to be pathogenic to sheep).

Dogs pick up tapeworms from eating uncooked animal carcasses, then defaecate on grass and the tiny eggs are ingested by sheep. The larvae develop inside the sheep and cause damage to tissues and organs. Worming the sheep will have absolutely no effect



Cranfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu
Ciwledig: Ewrop yn Buddsoddi
mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig
The European Agricultural Fund for
Rural Development: Europe Investing in
Rural Areas



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government





Damage done by acute fluke.



Example of chronic fluke.



Itchy sheep in abattoir lairage.



Increase in lymph node size throughout carcass.



Keeping animals free from internal and external parasites will help to keep animals clean, to grow well and maximise returns at slaughter. Talk to your vet to discuss improvements to your animal health plan.

but the following recommendations will help to reduce the problem.

1. Ensure all farm dogs are wormed at least once every 3 months, ideally every 6 weeks, with an effective wormer which contains praziquantel.
2. Ensure all visiting dogs have been recently wormed.
3. Ensure all dead stock is removed from the farm quickly and disposed of correctly.
4. Cook sheep meat before feeding to dogs.
5. Encourage the public to pick up their dogs faeces off your fields.
6. Tie dogs up/put in kennel when not working.

Keeping sheep and cattle clean

If sheep or cattle are dirty on arrival at the abattoir then harmful faecal bacteria can contaminate the carcass. Abattoirs can reduce the price paid to the farmer and even reject the whole carcass. Sheep and cattle should be kept as clean as possible whilst on farm and one of the main things to focus on is parasite control.

COCCIDIOSIS – Not all species of coccidia cause disease in sheep and cattle but if animals are affected by one of the pathogenic strains then animals will scour, live-weight gain will be reduced and losses can be high. Practical ways to reduce coccidiosis are:

1. When buildings are empty steam clean or use an ammonia based disinfectant.
2. Try not to overstock sheds or fields.
3. Aim for a compact lambing or calving
 - Older calves/lambs will have coccidia in larger numbers that can kill younger animals.
4. Try to group calves/lambs into 3 week batches i.e. maximum 21 day age difference.
5. Ensure that all new born animals have a good intake of colostrum.
6. Use plenty of clean, dry bedding, making sure that drainage is good.
7. Regularly change the position of shelters and troughs in fields.
8. Place water and feed troughs to avoid contamination with faeces.
9. Avoid grazing young animals on fields where there was a problem last year.

INTESTINAL WORMS – Good control of intestinal worms will help to maintain good performance and keep animals clean. Anthelmintic resistance is a major concern and every farmer should make sure that they are using effective wormers at the appropriate time and at the correct dose rate. Every farm should have a bespoke worm control plan worked out with their veterinary surgeon to both avoid further development of resistance and to keep lambs and cattle clean.

1. Consider faecal egg counting and only dose when needed.
2. Remember not all scouring is due to worms.
3. Get a correct diagnosis of the worms. Tailor your wormer to the worm that is causing the problem such as using a white drench for nematodirus or a vaccine for preventing lungworm in cattle.
4. Rotate your wormers. Do not use one type over several seasons.
5. Make sure the dosing gun is calibrated and is working correctly.
6. Make sure when using a pour-on you read the instructions in full.
7. Weigh the heaviest animal and treat the group to this weight.

See 'Know your anthelmintics 2012' SCOPS for more guidance at www.hccmpw.org.uk.

Controlling skin parasites to avoid damage to cattle hides and sheep skins

Hides and skins can be severely damaged by parasites which ultimately results in a lower price and reduced returns for the processor and farmer.

ITCHY SHEEP – Organophosphate (OP) dipping is the most effective way to treat and prevent sheep scab, blow fly strike and lice. However with the human and environmental implications of OP dips many farmers have turned to injectable or pour-on products. There are many effective drugs on the market but they are parasite specific. In the case of lice and scab it can be very difficult to distinguish between the two without professional help from a vet. As a general rule pour-ons do not treat sheep scab and injectables do not treat blowfly or lice.

Parasites that cause itching not only affect fleece and hide quality they also reduce live weight gain and in the case of scab can cause whole carcass condemnation due to the lymphadenopathy (increase in lymph node size).