

## Summer Flock Care

Lambing is over, and now you are wondering what all the fuss was about. You may think that sheep farming is easy after all, with long lazy summer days to look forward to. Then people start talking about worms, coccidiosis, foot rot, scald, fly strike, liver fluke, vaccinations and as if that isn't enough, shearing, which is after all one of the reasons you keep Cotswolds.

Well just like lambing, it is all simple and without too much trauma, if you stick to the rules:

Rule 1 - Sheep don't like to get sick.

Rule 2 - They are fine when everything is under control

Rule 3 - Let it go wrong and they will make you pay dearly with high vet bills and low growth rates, leading to poor returns for your breeding stock as well.

But don't panic, a little planning can avert most problems and minimise the effects of anything that slips past you.

Let's take each problem in turn.

**Worms:** Every sheep has them, they have wondrous sounding names that many people, including me, can't pronounce, yet they are relatively easy to control. If you keep sheep on the same pasture year after year the worm problem will build up and prevention becomes vital. There is a lot of talk about worm counts, which is when you collect fresh dung from your sheep and send it off to your vet for an egg count – this is simple to do but best talk to your vet first to find out when and how they like to receive the samples – before heading off to the field armed with an appropriate number of bags (sandwich bags are perfect). This will tell you how many worms your sheep are carrying and if you need to worm or not. Personally I prefer my sheep not to carry too many worms so I worm them regularly to keep the numbers low.

I know it is a bit old fashioned, but so am I. You will need to swap your wormers around to stop your worm population becoming immune to one particular type of wormer. This is easily done if you change brands and types each time you buy a new bottle. I do like to use Oromec on my lambs as it stays with them for 5 to 6 weeks and helps keep them clear. It is supposed to last up to 8 weeks, but I find 6 weeks works well. Remember to read the label to see how soon after dosing you can sell your lambs. Worming the ewes and rams in the autumn and spring also helps keep things under control (they do not need worming as often as lambs as the adult sheep develops some immunity to worms)

**Coccidiosis:** Again all sheep carry it and it is something that needs to be managed rather than eliminated. It is easily spotted in your lambs by the sudden onset of scour. This can be mistaken for worms, but if you have a good worm control policy you will not make this common mistake. The simple treatment is a dose of Vaccocine, it is expensive but very effective. You do get some ewes that seem more susceptible to Coccidiosis than others; it is a good idea to cull them as they will continually infect the rest of the flock. If you continually get a problem with this it will be worth talking to your vet to get a prevention policy in place.

**Sheep Fluke:** This is a growing problem in sheep which graze on wet ground. Fluke can cause major damage to a sheep's liver and other organs and where they are present in large numbers and untreated, they cause death. The vet can check for fluke eggs when you send in your samples for an egg count – otherwise you will know when the abattoir tells you that there is a problem (they will find damage to the liver, etc) or your sheep in the worst case – die. If you find you have fluke on your ground then you will need to use a flukicide, particularly in spring and autumn. Combinex is an excellent all round wormer, (although it does have a long 56 day withdrawal period) and kills fluke at all stages of development, however you will also need to use a pure flukicide at times, as you don't want to worm more than you have to. As with wormers you will need to rotate the flukicides so as not to build up resistance in the flukes.

**Foot Rot and Scald** I have put these two together even though they are not the same thing. Foot rot generally affects the ewes. If you are getting foot rot in your lambs you have serious problem and you need to talk to a vet to sort it out. More common in lambs is scald; this is best described as a very sore blister that forms between the toes and is extremely painful. It should be treated as it is painful for the lamb and it will often develop into full blown foot rot. However, if you run them through a foot bath with a foot care treatment in it this will quickly put things right. If, like me, you don't have a foot bath, then spraying between the toes on each affected foot with the purple foot rot spray you can obtain from your vet will also clear the problem up very quickly. It will spread through the flock if left untreated, and the lambs will fail to thrive.

**Fly Strike** I have always found this the most time wasting thing to treat that has ever been invented. It is caused by flies laying their eggs in the dirty wool around the back end of the sheep. As we all know Cotswold's can get very dirty around their back ends. Keeping your sheep clean firstly by ensuring they are healthy and wormed, and then by dagging them in April as their wool gets longer is vital; they become more susceptible to soiling as the spring grass flushes them.

Getting them shorn soon enough is also vital; the flies will attack the sheep on their shoulders as well if they get hot and sweaty during the early summer. It is very important to treat any ewes with fly strike immediately as the longer it is allowed to develop the more damage the maggots will do, and the greater the risk of secondary infection in the wounds. Once the sheep have been shorn the problem goes away for a few weeks until the wool gets long enough to harbor a fly's eggs again; this is usually 6 to 7 weeks. Remember that lambs can, and will, get struck as well, so do watch them as they grow. There are several spray on treatments to help prevent fly strike; it is worth buying one in early so you can treat the sheep as soon as you think there may be a problem - Crovect is one that both prevents, and treats, fly strike. This is one problem you really do want to try and prevent. If you are unfortunate enough to find a sheep that is scratching and rubbing herself, and is generally distressed on a nice, lazy summer day, you have almost certainly got a sheep with fly strike. Welcome to the club; it is not exclusive and counts practically every sheep farmer in the country as a member. It really is that common, so don't feel guilty, just catch the sheep, clip the wool away from the infected area, give it a good washing and apply some fly repellent to help the wound heal before it gets attacked again.

**Vaccination:** There are many diseases that can affect sheep and lambs and there are several vaccines which can be used to protect your flock - it is a good idea to discuss these with your vet. One such vaccine is Heptavac P + and this covers a wide spectrum of diseases. After the initial two injections, a month to six weeks apart, only an annual booster is required which is usually given four weeks before a ewe lambs, so that the protection will be passed, temporarily, on to her lambs.

**Blue Tongue** receives more than its fair share of publicity, it is very nasty. The bottom line is quite simple with this disease. One year's infection will cost more than 20 years vaccination. It is a no brainer as you have absolutely no control over the likelihood of getting this disease. It is down to the level of infection in the country and the weather, the number of sheep and stocking density play little if any part when calculating the risk to your flock. Many experts claim the Blue Tongue vaccine is a victim of its own success and it will take a major breakdown in this country before many shepherds take the disease seriously. The question is do you want to be on the losing side when the midges attack your sheep.

The Society is developing a network of Flock Advisors; it is worth getting in touch with the secretary to find your nearest one. This will be a good place to start seeking advice and you could also join the web based Society Forum where you can ask the members any question about your sheep. Try it. It costs nothing to ask.

Good luck