



HiHealth Flockcare Newsletter January 2017

*****New tests, research, surveillance, free parasitology testing and more!*****

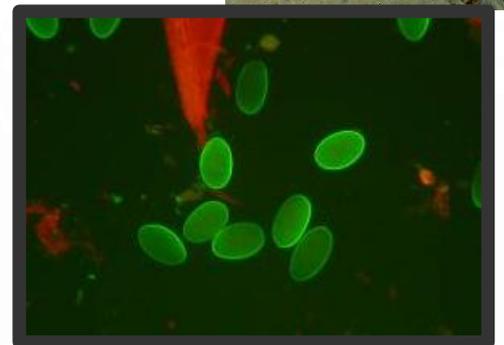
Dear all

Firstly Happy New Year to everyone! After a mild Christmas period there is a welcome frost and bright sunshine as I write and an air of optimism along with the new year resolutions I know I will break before January is out (daily yoga anyone!). Whether you are lambing or yet to scan I hope the year is productive and profitable. Here's a round up of what we've been up to on the sheep front in recent months and as ever if you have any views on the direction of the scheme please get in touch.

HiHealth Flockcare has had a successful year with more parasitology testing undertaken than ever as farmers take up the gauntlet of increased monitoring through faecal worm egg counts and post-drench efficacy checks. We have diagnosed more cases of Haemonchosis this past year too with extremely thin and pale ewes in affected flocks and very high worm egg counts.



The latest figures on anthelmintic resistance are chastening as increasing resistance to the clear, macrocyclic lactone (3-ML) class of wormers including moxidectin has been identified in flocks. If you haven't checked your status then a full on faecal egg count reduction test early in the grazing season on lambs is the gold standard and, although costly, can save money on ineffective treatments. At the very least, monitoring to find out if you need to treat and after treatment to check your chosen wormer has been effective should be ingrained in our management, but I'll be the first to admit I don't always practise what I preach with my own sheep! So that's another New Year resolution for me - more worm egg counts and post-drench efficacy checks.



In 2016 Biobest undertook the lab testing for the Zoetis Parasite Watch initiative where 10 farms throughout the UK followed a programme of sampling throughout the months March to October to monitor parasites through faecal worm egg counts, liver fluke coproantigen ELISA and fly traps. The individual farmers involved in the scheme benefited from technical support and shared their experiences through social media, together with best practice messages to increase awareness of anthelmintic resistance and SCOPS principles.

We have also been providing surveillance data (anonymised Nematodirus counts) to the University of Bristol and APHA to feed into Bristol's work on forecasting for Nematodirus.

Schmallenberg Virus Re-emergence

Schmallenberg virus first appeared in the UK in 2011 with deformities resulting from infection of pregnant cattle and sheep apparent from early 2012. There was little evidence of circulating virus in 2014 and 2015, but a positive case was reported in a calf in Devon in October 2016, and in late December 2016 the virus

was detected in deformed sheep fetuses from early lambing flocks in SW England (Devon, Dorset and Somerset) and confirmed by PCR testing at APHA. Suspect cases have since been examined from sheep holdings as far North as Yorkshire and County Durham (pending confirmation).

The virus is transmitted by biting midges and affects domestic and wild ruminants. The critical period in ewes for infections leading to deformed fetuses is the second month of pregnancy. Affected lambs typically have twisted limbs and abnormalities of the brain and spinal cord. This can make for difficult lambings and it is important to seek veterinary involvement early as caesarean sections may be needed and samples can be collected to confirm the diagnosis. There are other causes of fetal malformations and surveillance relies upon laboratory confirmation to assess the risk to the sheep and cattle population. The cost of examination of suspect cases at APHA and SRUC sites is subsidised by Government.



GB Surveillance

As an external member of the APHA Small Ruminant Expert Group I have regular contact with colleagues at APHA, SRUC and other institutes undertaking surveillance. This is useful to find out what the latest disease trends are and to discuss any unusual cases that have been investigated. The SREG produces reports each quarter that contain much of this information and they can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/small-ruminant-disease-surveillance-reports-2016> Highlights this autumn included increased cases of systemic pasteurellosis; farmers should be aware of the importance of following vaccination protocols correctly, as well as reducing stress and concurrent disease in store lambs in particular. Also of note were several cases of deaths in sheep treated with the flukicide oxcyclozanide (marketed as a drench alone and in combination with levamisole). Affected sheep had swollen faces and high temperatures. Inadequate mixing and overdosage most likely led to the deaths outlining the importance of handling drugs appropriately and weighing stock before treatment.

Out and about...

It's been a busy year in terms of presentations at veterinary conferences including Sheep Vet Society in Skipton in May and London Vet Show at the ExCel in November. On both occasions, postmortem examination and sample selection were discussed, as where there's livestock there is inevitably deadstock and we can learn a lot from examining dead sheep, particularly when it comes to some of the causes of chronic weight loss in adult sheep. We also had a good days out at NSA Scotsheep at Glenrath, near Peebles and at the Sheep Health and Welfare Group (SHAUG) conference in Worcester, with plenty of thought provoking discussion with farmers about sheep matters in general and the HiHealth Flockcare scheme.

In 2017 we will be at NSA Highland Sheep event in Strathpeffer on 31st May - come and have a chat about what you'd like the scheme to provide for you. I will also be at the International Sheep Veterinary Congress in Harrogate presenting the results of the Ovine Pulmonary Adenocarcinoma pilot study (see below) and

hope to meet some of you at other events around the UK to discuss the potential for flock assurance schemes.

OPA research project

In the last newsletter I reported on the pilot study Biobest was working on with colleagues from Moredun to develop the PCR test for Ovine Pulmonary Adenocarcinoma (OPA) as a commercial test to be used on thin ewes to screen flocks and enable flocks to be identified as low or high risk.

OPA is a viral disease that causes lung tumours in sheep. There is no treatment or vaccine and no laboratory test available for use in the live animal. Once clinical signs appear the disease is invariably fatal. Affected flocks may lose as many as 20 per cent of stock in the first few years that OPA is seen, and the disease may continue to account for the loss of a few per cent of sheep every year for many years thereafter. The disease appears to be increasingly common throughout the UK and the ability to identify flocks carrying OPA is required.



The project is now complete and a diagnostic test on nasal swabs from thin ewes developed and evaluated that could be used to screen flocks for OPA.

A test that would allow producers to determine whether their flock is infected would be advantageous in two ways. It would enable farmers to identify if the infection is present in their flock and take control measures to minimise losses. Perhaps more importantly, the 70 - 90% of flocks that are estimated to be free of the disease would be able to buy replacement breeding stock from flocks deemed to have a low risk of being infected with OPA.

In the pilot study the new test on nasal swabs from thin ewes was evaluated in a small number of flocks and was shown to detect the virus only in flocks that were affected with OPA. The virus was not detected in any of the flocks known to be free of disease.

As a flock test based on sampling thin ewes, this could be used to identify low-risk flocks and facilitate an OPA assurance scheme.

Further validation of the test is planned, in addition to engagement with stakeholders to determine how a robust and cost-effective assurance scheme can be developed to meet their needs. If you are interested in getting involved either from the perspective of breed societies or individual flocks please get in touch.

The study was funded by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), Hŷbu Cig Cymru (HCC), Northern Ireland Agricultural Research and Development Council (AgriSearch) and Biobest Laboratories Ltd, with some support from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).

Sheep scab ELISA blood test

We are pleased to offer the new ELISA blood test for the detection of sheep scab infestation from January 2017. The test detects antibodies in the host sheep and can detect infestation before clinical signs are evident. Therefore it will be a useful tool in control of sheep scab which continues to impact on sheep welfare and productivity in the UK.



Detection of infestation before sheep become overtly itchy is key to controlling disease; as is detecting flocks where there is no evidence of sheep scab so the 3-ML injectables are not used unnecessarily as they are also anthelmintics and are so important for worm control.

The test has been used by Moredun, who developed the test, in several flocks in Scotland and Northumberland as part of a Livestock Health Scotland project.

When used to test blood samples from 12 animals per management group we can have a 95% confidence of detecting antibodies where the disease prevalence is 20%. In flocks with clinical cases the prevalence is often much higher than this.

In collaboration with Bimeda we will be testing 6 flocks this month and undertaking a short survey of risk factors to gain knowledge of how the test may best be applied in different flock types. The project will cover sampling fees and laboratory testing, although not your vet's visit fee. If you wish to take part please get in touch as soon as possible.

Follow us on twitter @HHFlockcare . We'd love to see images of your flocks.



As always I am keen to discuss flock health issues and the direction you want the scheme to take for the future so do get in touch.

All the best for 2017

Rebecca and the team

