

Benefits of using FAECAL EGG COUNTS

The priority for worm control is to minimise the effect these parasites have on lamb performance. However, it is important to consider the long-term sustainability of any control programme by avoiding the reliance on wormers as the sole means of control. Find out how using FECs has impacted our Challenge Sheep farmers.

A good plan includes a long-term, regularly reviewed worming strategy, which can be adapted to cope with changing patterns from year to year. Monitoring worm burdens using faecal egg counts (FECs) can help ensure that treatments remain effective. A FEC can be used to determine if a wormer is required, test efficacy post treatment and provide guidance on the amount of contamination going onto pasture.



Using FECs has made it easier to rule out parasite burden from low daily liveweight gains. Samples can be submitted to your vet, some merchants and via a FECPAK system. The results give you a clearer picture of worm burdens on drug efficacies. It is a tool we would not be without, but it must be used alongside all other aspects of good practice, such as weighing your lambs to determine dose weight and checking the calibration of drench guns.

Check scops.org.uk for regular updates.

About Challenge Sheep

The Challenge Sheep project is three years into the seven-year study. The aim is to develop best practice for managing replacement ewes and to understand the impact of the first year's production on a ewe's lifetime performance. With 11 farmers actively engaged in recording data for the duration of the project, there are 7,000 replacements being tracked from a variety of sheep farms across England.

To find out more visit:
ahdb.org.uk/challenge-sheep

WHY USE THE NEW GROUP 4-AD AND 5-SI WORMERS?

The two newest wormer groups (4-AD and 5-SI) should be incorporated into worm control programmes on all sheep farms – not left on the shelf until the others are no longer effective. Their real value is in prolonging the life of 1-BZ, 2-LV and 3-ML groups. There are only two occasions when a group 4-AD or 5-SI should be used and alternate between the two groups. These two occasions are during quarantine, and in the mid-to-late season as a one-off annual drench for lambs.



Meet Challenge Sheep farmers

ROB & ANNA HAWKE



First generation farmers Rob and Anna joined the project for the opportunity to access and exchange information with experts and farmers. As well as collecting electronic identification information, including weights, body condition score (BCS) and lambing data,

Challenge Sheep farmers have had help with monitoring their worm burden and testing the effectiveness of treatment.

Rob and Anna adopted the use of FECs early on. This involved them sending regular samples of their lambs' faeces to be tested by their vet. Before this, the lambs would have been wormed roughly every six weeks. Since joining, Rob and Anna have had access to a FECPAK, an internet-connected, image-based diagnostic platform which enables them to conduct FECs themselves, on-farm.

Since carrying out FEC testing and increasing sampling frequency, Rob and Anna been able to reduce the number of doses on average from five to just three per lamb per year. Through improving their understanding, they've been able to target specific groups of parasites and carry out post-drench checks to establish wormer efficacy.

Rob said: "In a normal year the lambs might get treated for nematodirus with a white wormer in April/May, a Class 4 or 5 at weaning in June and a dose of yellow or clear wormer in mid-to-late September. Having used FEC for some time, I would definitely recommend a post-drench FEC as a policy because I think everyone needs to know their status. More producers should use FEC, be more proactive with their parasite control and prolong the efficacy of wormer groups. Not only that, there are large cost savings to be made by only worming when necessary.

"We've discovered our worm burden peaks in late autumn, and from doing our own testing we are gradually building a picture of each block of land. This enables us to restrict resistance issues in each block individually."

