

Thinking of replenishing your flock this autumn? Remember that quarantine is key to protecting your flock

Thousands of breeding and store sheep will be moved around the UK during the next few months. Many farmers are blind to the potential peril surrounding purchased animals when moved onto their holding, and are often susceptible to buying in unwanted problems.

Wormer resistance, foot diseases and scab are only a handful of problems which could potentially be introduced to your farm via purchased livestock. Studies show that only 10% of farmers follow the correct quarantine procedures after purchasing new sheep. It is likely that the failure to follow the correct quarantine procedures is simply down to practicalities such as space, time, cost of treatments and very often, underestimating the risk.

According to sheep specialist Lesley Stubbings, there are three main elements to effective quarantine that all farmers need to remember. "It's very important to isolate all in-coming sheep. I suggest housing or yarding them for at least 24-48 hours, where they should be given treatments against unseen threats. Remember – during this period they should be kept separate to the resident flock".

"Isolation should be maintained for at least three weeks. New sheep should be turned out to isolated grazing – which has, ideally, carried sheep recently so that new sheep are introduced to the worm population," Lesley added.

Although purchasing sheep in due course prior to the tuppings season may prove a challenge, some farmers find that having all new sheep in isolation and in the same place actually saves time, especially when vaccinating.

Arranging suitable isolation facilities and ensuring the correct treatments are involved in an effective quarantine procedure may seem costly, but that is considered a fraction of the cost should you find that you've brought CODD or sheep scab into your flock. Scab can take up to six months to show, and by this time, the majority of breeding ewes will be affected, along with their young lambs.

Buying in anthelmintic resistance can also prove a major threat to the flock. Imagine the costs associated with not being able to use any of the three main wormer groups effectively. Be vigilant.

It's always hard to estimate the risk of disease from purchased livestock, as often, they wouldn't tend to show any symptoms which may suggest that they're a threat to your flock. Some issues such as anthelmintic resistance may not become obvious until several months or years down the line. By this time, the damage is done.

Footrot, orf, CODD, CLA, and Maedi Visna are all included in the list of potential health threats from purchased livestock. All of which aren't visible, some you can test for, and some which may take up to years to appear.

SCOPS (Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep) have recommended treatments for resistant roundworms and sheep scab. Their recommendation is based on the principle of administering two broad spectrum anthelmintics, both of which have a minimal risk of being any resistance to them, which ensures that as near to 100% of the worms are killed.

For treating resistant worms, they suggest two options: Drench with either Zolvix or Startect and inject with 1% moxidectin, or drench with either Zolvix and Startect and a moxidectin drench. If Footvax is to be used, SCOPS suggest replacing the 1% moxidectin with either 2% moxidectin or Doramectin.

For treating sheep scab, they suggest two options: that the sheep are covered by the moxidectin injection administered whilst treating resistant worms, or plunge dip in an OP dip. SCOPS highlight the importance of complying with withdrawal period regulations.

When dealing with liver fluke, an element of risk assessment is present. Farmers should consider the risk of transmitting liver fluke from the originating farm, and therefore should treat the animals. It is also important that farmers are aware of their own liver fluke status in order to select the most effective treatment.

If there is a history of liver fluke on the receiving farm, treatment should be aimed at preventing disease in the incoming sheep as well as preventing transmitting Triclabendazole resistant liver fluke on to the farm.

SCOPS recommend various options for treating incoming sheep. The first option includes treating incoming sheep with Triclabendazole, although this must be followed up by a second drench to ensure it has worked effectively. A follow up treatment with Closantel or Nitroxynil six weeks later may be required.

The second option is to treat incoming sheep with Closantel or Nitroxynil twice, two weeks apart. Animals must graze low risk pastures between treatments and after the second treatment if this is possible. If animals aren't at risk from immediate disease, treatment can be delayed until they've been housed for at least 5-6 weeks. In this circumstance, only one treatment is required.

Download the 2015 SCOPS 'Know Your Anthelmintics' leaflet at www.scops.org.uk