

Winter aftermath

Another tough winter on sheep has meant that some have struggled to hold condition. Vet **Richard Knight** looks at the implications for sheep farmers across the country



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Much energy is used by sheep traipsing around a field looking for grass which is edible, with the better shepherds already spotting this need and working to rectify it by either housing sheep due to lamb soon, giving better quality forage in feeders or trough feeding concentrate cake.

Several times in the past weeks the discussion of whether to move feeders around a field, or to leave one area a bit poached up, has arisen. The conclusion seems to be that wrecking one area is preferable to damaging the whole lot, but great attention should be

paid to the feet, addressing lameness straight away.

There are several studies which show that shepherds who pay immediate attention to lame sheep, rather than leaving symptoms to develop and then treating a larger batch, have fewer problems with lameness across the board. That translates into more meat reared. A sheep with sore feet is going to struggle to find everything she needs to eat, which means she will be more prone to getting sick around lambing and then may very well go on to have a lower milk yield than she ought.

VACCINATION

Likewise, if sheep are housed early then the risk of developing infectious foot conditions such as foot-rot and CODD (contagious ovine digital dermatitis) is increased. Consideration of foot-rot vaccination should be a matter of course. Many shepherds still do not know that a vaccine is available, and the pros and cons of undertaking a programme.

Attention to detail and revision of foot bath volumes and dilution rates never go amiss either as these calculations are often 'mis-remembered' from year-to-year. We also find that there are still many folk entering the sheep industry with very small flocks. These people are usually hungry for information and keen to do everything

right from the outset, rather than progress by trial and error. Make sure that folks are stocked up with the necessary disinfectant sprays and foot bath preparations. If there are any queries, or no response to treatment then their usual farm veterinarian should always be consulted sooner rather

than later to avoid any problems escalating.

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TIPS FOR SQPS

- Make sure customers are stocked up with disinfectant sprays and foot bath preparations.
- Consult the vet as early as possible.
- Immediate attention to any lame sheep saves money.

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