

News Release

For immediate release

Research Highlights Benefits For Farmers Using On-Farm Faecal Egg Counting

Results from new EU-funded research show that, with the right equipment and guidance, farmers can accurately carry out faecal egg counts, giving them a better understanding of the roundworm problems on their farm and helping them to target treatment when it is needed. On average the number of doses administered was reduced by 35% per year which resulted in an average financial saving of £663 per farm per year on sheep wormer costs alone. The reduced reliance on anthelmintics should also help delay wormer resistance on their properties.

The European Union provided 2.9 million Euro for an international research project to address growing concerns about current practices in the management of internal parasites in ruminants. The project has run over three years involving seven EU countries as well as Morocco and South Africa and is coordinated by Professor Jozef Vercruysse of the University of Ghent

Part of the research programme, known as PARASOL (PARASite SOLutions), aims to test the practical applications of various Targeted Selective Treatment (TST) initiatives. Desired outcomes are reduced reliance on wormers with resulting cost savings, reducing the threat of wormer resistance and improved quality of animal products off the farm.

One part of the project run in the UK by Innovis assessed the impact of on farm faecal egg counting. Farms in the project were geographically dispersed in the UK and included a range of farm types from hill to lowland.

Using the FECPAK system, which was developed in New Zealand, farmers participating in the project showed an average 35 percent reduction in treatments with anthelmintic wormers with no reported negative effects on the performance of lambs. In some cases there was an increase in lamb performance. Farmers reported the FECPAK system was quick and easy to use. Verification tests also showed the farmers to be accurate.

For Northumberland sheep and beef farmer Alan Cowan, it was the ability to see more clearly what was going on that made the difference to him.

“Although saving on drench costs is a benefit, the greatest advantage I have seen is that I now have confidence in only worming when it’s needed and I can hopefully delay the development of resistance to the levamisole and ML groups on my farm”

Professor Vercruysse says the PARASOL Project has validated that farmers can move to a TST approach.

“But you need the tools to implement it and FECPAK has demonstrated that it is one of the tools that can be used very successfully on-farm.”

A survey showed that 74 % of farmers using the system reduced their numbers of treatments to lambs. This was achieved by timing treatment for when the worm burden was shown to be present rather than guessing or blanket treating. Those reductions ranged from 20 % up to 75 % fewer wormer treatments that were actually required.

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For Eurion Thomas, Operations Manager for Innovis, the company that brought the technology into PARASOL and who managed the research, the most exciting part of the results are in the observations of farmers who took part.

He says that farmers found, after using the equipment with a short training session, they were able to take greater control of their parasite management. Ninety-one percent of users said they had gained a more complete understanding of the parasite situation on their farms and now had the knowledge to know how to deal with it in a more sophisticated and sustainable way.

“Farmers found it empowering to be capable of calculating faecal egg counts themselves on-farm by using the right equipment and having the right guidance. Using the FECPAK system they are able to do the testing themselves and get immediate results rather than guessing at what is happening or, even worse, doing nothing.”

Mr. Thomas says that the recommendations that come out of the project and survey work are particularly important.

“We can now say that on-farm faecal egg counting should be included as one of the diagnostic tools used in the TST approach.”

“We also can conclude faecal egg counting can be used across a wide range of farm management systems to help determine the timing and necessity of anthelmintic treatments. It can also allow more effective targeting of which groups of animals need treatment and then check the efficacy of those treatments.”

“It can require a change in mindset but there are plenty of European farmers who are looking at smarter ways to farm. This system puts practical tools in the hands of farmers who want to embrace the sustainable thinking behind Targeted Selective Treatment.”

Dr Frank Jackson of Moredun Research Institute in Edinburgh, Scotland, says the project farms clearly demonstrate TST provides a number of benefits to the farmer through reducing drenching frequency, timing treatments correctly, and discovering undetected drench resistance, among others.

“However, farmers need to use these tools correctly in order to maximize benefits.”

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