

# The benefits of regular on farm FEC testing

Andrew Nicholson, High Lorton, Cumbria

## FARM DETAILS:

- 740 acre hill, upland and lowland farm with fell grazing
- Flock of 1400 Swaledales, Herdwicks and mules.
- 40 cow suckler herd with calves sold as store cattle

## SUMMARY RESULTS:

- Average 19 FEC tests / year completed
- Number of doses administered / year **reduced by 60% on average\***
- Changed timing of dosing and which groups dosed
- Before the project started the average number of doses per lamb was 5 – this decreased to below 2 in 2008
- Significant savings in labour

### Financial saving on purchase of wormers\*

Annual saving on purchase of wormers	£1,897
Annual saving per adult ewe	£1.32
% reduction in wormer costs	65%

\*Average of 2 years before start of project compared to average of 2 years after start of project  
Only takes account of sheep wormers

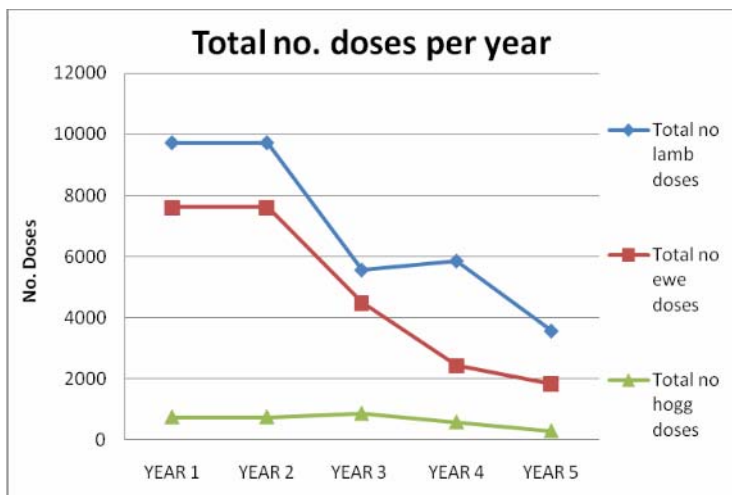


## Comment:

As can be seen in the graph there has been a massive reduction in dosing which, due to the large flock, results in a significant financial benefit. It must be said that this farm had the heaviest dosing regime before the start of the project but one not uncommon for many sheep farms.

Although FEC testing resulted in missing some routine treatments a large amount of the decrease seen in years 3 and 4 was more down to a change of attitude. Andrew found it difficult to find time to test in the first 2 years and although a few tests were done he found it a bit fiddly. In the final year that Andrew finally got to grips with the system and got in to the habit of regular FEC testing. Approximately 25 tests were done in 2008 and this is reflected by the further decrease in worming.

As the farm has blocks of land away from the homestead Andrew liked the systems portability. He would set the FECPAK unit up next to the pens and use sunlight off the mirror on the microscope as not all handling facilities have electricity. When sheep were routinely handled he would collect a sample and FEC test there and then to decide whether to dose that group before they were turned out. He also found an advantage with the fell lambs which aren't gathered often. When weaned off the fell they are usually wormed but in last 2 years FEC has shown that this is not needed.



\* FEC monitoring started in year 3

\* Data adjusted so that stock numbers were fixed across all years

## Ewe Dosing:

Andrew was nervous of removing the autumn treatment to his crossing Swaledales even after a 0 egg count. He was concerned about the lambing percentage but in the first year of the project they scanned 190% which was better than ever and has given him confidence for future decisions.

In January, Mule ewes that are usually wormed as they are housed were not treated in 2007 following a low FEC result. The advice was to test them again as they lambed and were turned out – again these ewes were not treated at lambing due to a low count. Five weeks after lambing the FEC counts had risen to 300 epg which wasn't extremely high but they would have been contaminating the best pastures and as the ewes were being handled anyway it was decided to drench them. In contrast the pure Swaledale ewes needed to be dosed at turnout.

Fluke treatments are still required – but care is taken to use narrow spectrum flukicides when a wormer is needed.

FEC has been effectively used to monitor contamination from ewes in the spring and a suppressive drench given accordingly.

'It's been an eye-opener for me to realise how much wormer and time I have wasted in the past. I only drenched my crossbred lambs twice last year and they were ready for market quicker than usual'

Andrew Nicholson