

The benefits of regular on farm FEC testing

Dave Knight, Minehead, Somerset

FARM DETAILS:

- 600 acre lowland farm
- Flock of 620 mule and crossbreeds lambing in 3 lots from January to March
- 100 cow spring calving suckler herd
- Half young cattle sold as stores and half finished

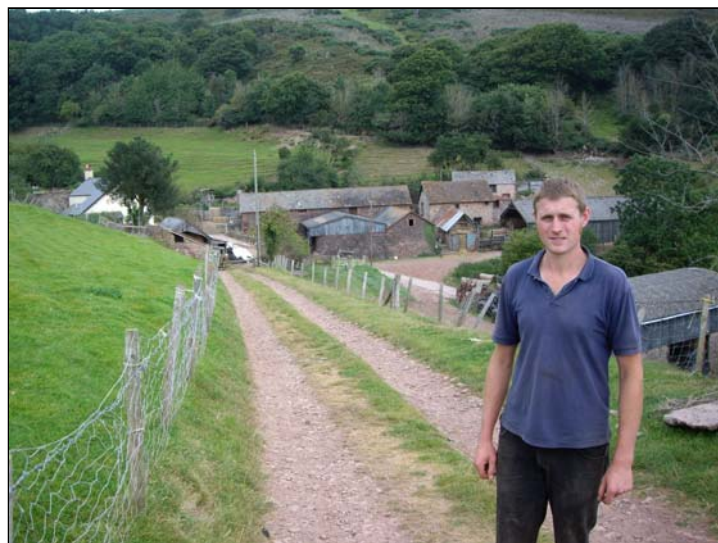
SUMMARY:

- Average 45 FEC tests / year completed
- Number of doses administered / year **reduced by 32%** on average*
- Used FEC to check efficacy of treatments
- Confirmed drench resistance to both white (1 BZ) and levamisole (2 LM)
- Change to ewe dosing policy around lambing

Financial saving on purchase of wormers*

Annual saving on purchase of wormers	£534.81
Annual saving per adult ewe	£0.86
% reduction in wormer costs	46%

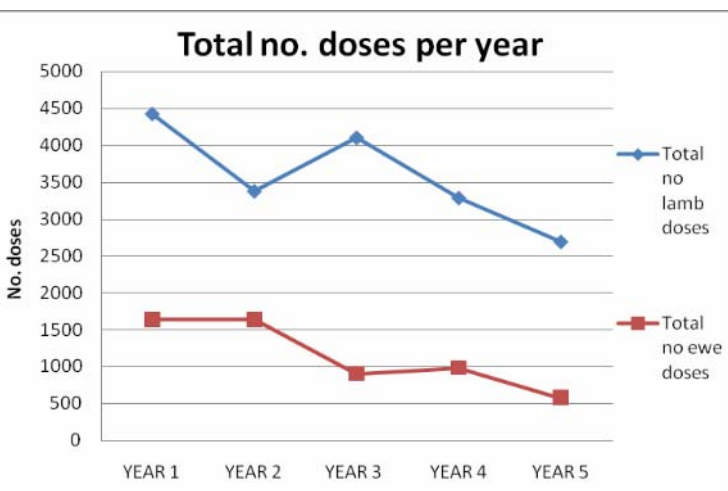
*Average of 2 years before start of project compared to average of 2 years after start of project
Only takes account of sheep wormers



Comment:

Since coming home to the farm from college, Dave has been striving to improve the production of the sheep enterprise. Significant reductions have been made to the cost of controlling parasites since he has been monitoring FEC. What we can't see from the graph is that the decrease in wormer usage has come at the same time as an increase in stocking rates with nearly twice as many lambs on the farm in 2008 compared to the 2 years before the start of the project. So even though the sheep management has been intensified there was still scope for reducing dosing.

Testing different groups has identified big variations between lambs depending on age and where they are grazing. The table below gives an extract from Dave's data to show how 1 group of lambs were monitored through a season.



* FEC monitoring started in year 3

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

DATE	Group Name	Average EPG	Treated	Reason for decision
21/03/2008	G1 twins	90	N	low FEC, check again
11/04/2008	G1 twins	870	Y	high count esp Nem
15/05/2008	G1 twins	225	N	low FEC - looking well
30/05/2008	G1 twins	540	Y	last chance to dose - withdrawal

Drench resistance:

The resistance tests done on this farm were slightly concerning with failure to both the white (1 BZ) and Levamisole (2 LM) groups. They were already suspicious of the white drench but only getting an 85% reduction from using Levamisole surprised them as up until 2007 they didn't think they had used a drench from this family in the last 12 – 15 years.

Our assumption is that the resistant worms were probably brought in with purchased replacement ewes, which is a useful reminder to maintain your quarantine drenches.

Records of lambs sold have shown an improvement in growth rate and days to market which Dave thinks is partly down to changing to an Ivermectin (3 ML) drench.

Seeing as the ML's are the only wormer that is totally effective Dave knows he has to be careful not to get resistance to this third group, and is taking measures to minimise drench usage. For example through the recording of FEC counts Dave has been able to identify certain fields or parts of the farm that are heavily infected and will look at dealing with this by altering management such as grazing these areas with cattle or non susceptible stock.

"When the project finishes I can't see me going back to just guessing when the sheep need worming. I will continue to use FECPAK and record FEC results. It's far less hassle than dosing sheep that don't need it!"

Dave Knight