

Keep Resistant Parasites Out When Buying Stock In

We know that purchased stock presents a risk, and that quarantine is important to protect our own flock from introduced diseases, but it's also essential to consider what internal parasites the new animals could be harbouring. Bought-in animals can carry resistant parasites which, if allowed to contaminate your pasture, will spread to your existing stock.

Resistance is when the strain of parasites carried by an animal can survive treatment. This means that even when you dose sheep to control worms or fluke, a proportion of the parasites will survive and continue to cause reduced productivity, illness or even deaths. Unfortunately, resistance is on the increase, and measures to prevent it are vital to avoid finding yourself with uncontrollable parasite problems in the future.

Apply the following measures when you purchase new stock:

- **Quarantine** the animals, preferably in a concrete yard or bare paddock from arrival until one or two days after treatment, so any worm eggs they are shedding cannot contaminate pasture. Dung from this period should never be disposed of on pasture which will be grazed by sheep. If a yard or bare paddock is not available, you must select a field with no wet "fluky" areas. In order of greatest to least preference:
 - o Arable field eg stubble or cover crop not to be grazed for multiple years
 - o Pasture destined for grazing by only cattle next year
 - o Pasture destined for silage next year followed by sheep
 - o Pasture destined to be grazed by sheep next spring – avoid if possible
- **Worms** - Treat all new sheep, which will require two separate treatments with **specific active ingredients** to kill all worms present in the gut. This should be discussed with your vet as product choice can be complex. Your vet can also advise you on spacing treatments – they should not all be given at the same time.
- Then turn the sheep out onto **dirty pasture for three weeks**, such as pasture which has been grazed by lambs, with the aim of the sheep becoming infected by your own local population of worms. Choose a **dry field**, with no snail habitat, so that any liver fluke eggs which continue to be shed in this period have no way to complete their lifecycle – temporary/electric fencing can be useful for this. If possible do not graze this field the following year.
- **Liver fluke** - treat all animals with more than one fluke product during the quarantine period. One product should contain triclabendazole, and one should contain nitroxinil or monepantel.
- As with any fluke and worm treatment, your vet is likely to recommend that you collect samples post-dosing to **check that the treatments have been effective**.

Once you have resistant parasites on your farm there may be no going back, so these steps are well worthwhile. It is important to plan treatments and quarantine sites carefully and your vet can support you to do this, ideally as part of a health plan, taking other infectious disease risks into account.

Other useful resources can be found on the SCOPS and FAS websites at www.scops.org.uk and <https://www.fas.scot/sheep-liver-fluke-tool/>

Addendum

After writing this article I was asked whether dung collected during the yarding period could be given to a neighbour for cattle pasture, or spread on a field to be ploughed in.

Unfortunately, neither can be recommended. While resistant sheep parasites would not affect the cattle, sheep dung can also carry other pathogens such as the organism responsible for Johne's disease.

There would be a biosecurity risk to accepting dung from a neighbouring farm. Ploughing in the dung may also seem like a sensible option, but some species of worms (eg *Nematodirus*) can remain for very long periods in the ground and can survive tilling and reseedling.

The best options are to either incinerate the dung, or if this is not possible spread it on arable-only pasture.

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