

Consequences of FMD Restrictions on Cattle and Sheep Health

This autumn, as a knock-on effect of the Foot and Mouth disease restrictions, beef and sheep farms have had many more mouths to feed than expected. Although most farms have had plenty of grass, the combination of the wet summer and pressure on grazing may have led to liver fluke infesting both cattle and sheep on many farms.

Liver Fluke

The liver fluke parasite has a complicated life cycle that involves a mud snail which thrives in the conditions experienced in the recent mild winters and wetter summers. Consequently liver fluke disease is spreading throughout Scotland. Immature liver fluke parasites invade the liver where they develop and mature before they enter the bile ducts and become mature adults. Mature flukes cause anaemia and wasting in cattle and sheep while many immature flukes can kill sheep of all ages as a result of liver damage and internal bleeding.

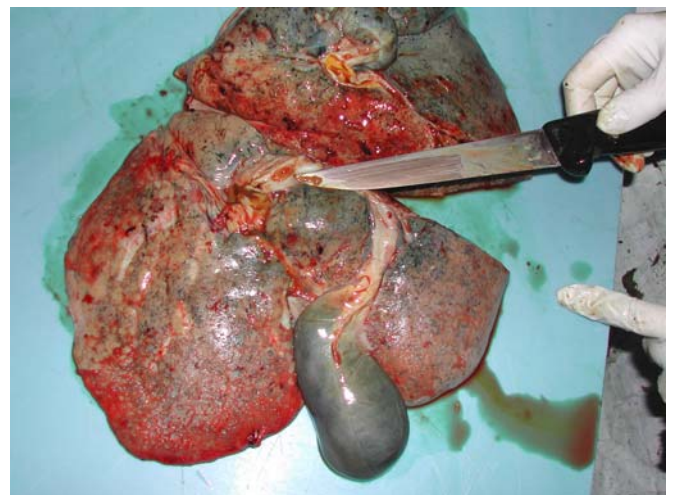
All farmers need to assess the risk of liver fluke to their flocks and herds. Where there is a risk, livestock should be treated now with a flukicidal product that kills both immature stages and adult stages. Further treatments may be needed in December or January. On farms with no history of the disease, dung samples should be sent to the local SAC veterinary laboratory to check for evidence of liver fluke eggs. Alternatively the slaughterhouse may be able to give feedback on the presence of flukey livers in slaughtered stock.

Parasites

This autumn, ewes probably received a heavy parasitic worm challenge because of the pressure on grazing and the additional numbers of lambs held on farms. Routine worming of all ewes pre-tupping is not advisable because this increases the selection pressure for wormer resistance (i.e. wormers failing to kill all the parasites in the sheep). Fit and healthy sheep in the autumn are very resistant to parasitic worm challenge and dosing these sheep with wormer

is generally a waste of money. Farmers are advised only to worm young sheep (gimmers) and ewes that are in poor bodily condition at this time of the year. If in doubt dung samples can be collected for laboratory examination.

Call in your veterinary surgeon, if some animals in a flock or herd are in poor bodily condition and fail to respond to treatment and/or additional feeding. If there are unexpected losses, it is advisable to have carcasses examined post mortem in one of SACs eight diagnostic laboratories. The Scottish Government supports the cost of these examinations.



A typical diseased liver from a sheep that has died from acute liver fluke disease. Note the immature fluke at the end of the knife.

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