

Parasite control in grazing beef cattle

As the grazing season progresses, the risk of parasite infection typically increases because of the accumulation of infective stages of gut worms and liver fluke on pasture and weather conditions that favour the rapid development of lungworm larvae.

Generally, older cattle that have grazed previously for at least two full grazing seasons (>4 months) will have acquired immunity to gut worms and lungworms, though immunity to lungworms is dependent on exposure and has a short duration. This means the focus for parasite control falls mainly on youngstock grazing their first and second season. It is also important to know that there is no effective immunity to liver fluke, which means cattle of all ages can be infected.

Spring-born calves

In a typical spring-calving beef suckler herd, while calves are at foot there is little need to treat for worms as relatively low herbage (and hence larval) intake and the protective effect of cow's milk mean that the parasites have little impact on calves.



First grazing season

Dairy-bred calves or autumn-born suckled calves have a much higher risk of worm burdens than spring-born suckler calves in their first grazing season. These young cattle will be exposed to parasites for the first time with no immunity.

The options for treatment with anthelmintics for these cattle is to either treat early in the season to limit pasture contamination or to 'wait and see' and treat when signs of parasite infection appear. If the latter approach is taken, it is important to monitor body condition, health

and performance regularly using weigh scales or a weigh band. Collecting egg counts will mean that problems will be picked up early. Low-risk pastures such as reseeds or silage aftermaths provide a useful opportunity for reducing reliance on anthelmintic treatments.

It is worth monitoring cattle that have been turned out for their first grazing season carefully during the first two months as growth rates during this period are a good indicator of exposure to parasites. Sampling fresh dung and analysing it for faecal egg counts at this time can also provide an indication of parasite burdens.



Second grazing season cattle

The susceptibility of cattle to parasites during their second grazing season depends to some extent on the exposure that they experienced during the previous year. As a rule of thumb, calves that were late born or that were weaned late (less than a month before housing) will have incomplete immunity to stomach worms and may benefit from one or two anthelmintic doses at the start of their second grazing season.

Control of lungworm

Lungworm control also needs to be considered and will be achieved to some extent alongside control of gutworms with wormer treatments. However, in high risk areas, the use of vaccination prior to turn out is recommended.

Control of liver fluke

Liver fluke should be controlled if cattle are grazing on infected pastures. If cattle start the grazing season free of liver fluke, then the first flukicide treatment can be delayed until around eight to 12 weeks after turn-out, which will help to keep the level of pasture contamination down. Monitoring youngstock through regular weighing, backed up with dung samples to check for fluke eggs, will help determine if any further treatments are needed over the remainder of the grazing season. Avoiding grazing high risk areas in late summer and autumn is also recommended.



More information can be found in the BRP manual
[Controlling Worms and Liver Fluke in Cattle for Better Returns](#).

Further information on parasite control can be found on the COWS [website](#).

Forecasts of current parasite risk can be found at on the NADIS [website](#).

The BRP [Cattle and Sheep Parasite Control Product Guide](#) provides a comprehensive list of products for the control of internal and external parasites in cattle and sheep