The estimated losses from footrot alone equate to around £6 a year for every ewe in Great Britain. If all the other causes of lameness were taken into account, the total cost to the industry would be staggering.

It may not be possible to eradicate lameness entirely, but significant steps can be made to reduce levels to the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) targets of <2% and minimise the financial costs producers currently incur.

Lameness will not be cured by one ‘magic bullet’. However, farmers should develop a strategy to reduce lameness in their flock.
The five point management plan gives farmers a clear strategy to control lameness on their farm.

These five actions should result in three outcomes for the flock:
- **Increased natural resilience to the disease**
- **Reduced disease challenge on the farm**
- **Improved immunity via vaccination**

By implementing all five points in the plan together farmers can tackle the disease from all angles giving their flock the best chance of staying clear of lameness problems.

**Cull – Build resilience**

Lame ewes spread disease to other ewes and lambs. Sheep that have suffered severe or repeated bouts of lameness can develop chronically infected and misshapen feet. These animals act as a constant source of infection, making other control measures ineffective. They should be removed from the flock.

It can be difficult to cull apparently productive ewes. However, culling hard in the first year will boost overall resilience levels in the flock and reduce the amount of disease that is spread.

**ACTION** – Identify repeat offenders, use cull tags or EID. Be tough - two strikes and then cull.
Quarantine – Reduce disease challenge

Incoming animals bring different strains of bacteria onto the farm and are a big risk to existing stock.
When buying in sheep, buy carefully. Do not accept stock which are lame or with chronically misshapen feet.
Quarantine incoming stock for at least three weeks and footbath on arrival.

Ideally check every ewe to look for early signs of footrot or contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD).

ACTION – Only buy from sources that take a pro-active approach to tackling lameness. Decide on a quarantine procedure with the vet and stick to it.

Treat – Reduce disease challenge

Disease spreads quickly so treat even mildly lame sheep as soon as possible. Rapid treatment helps stop the cycle of infection.

- **Catch** – within three days of becoming lame
- **Inspect** – clean away dirt but do not trim hoof horn
- **Diagnose** – identify correct cause. Seek advice from the vet if not sure
- **Treat** – see decision tree for treatment options
- **Mark** – affected limb and record tag number
- **Cull** – all repeat offenders

This may be a tough plan of action for the first few months, but if all the steps are followed, the lameness situation will improve.

When treating animals, ensure the right type of drug is given for the disease and the correct dose. Discuss this with the vet. Avoid routine foot trimming.

**ACTION** – Look for all lameness, not just the worst cases. Act quickly to treat.
Avoid – Reduce disease challenge

Avoid spreading infection during handling, gathering and when the sheep are out in the field. Bacteria spread easily in wet, soiled handling areas and in muddy fields.

Improve under-foot conditions in any poached areas or where there is heavy traffic. Spread gravel, woodchips or lime.

Upgrade and clean up permanent handling areas and tracks, or consider mobile handling systems.

Footbathing can be useful if carried out with the right products and if the sheep can stand in them for the right amount of time. After footbathing sheep need a place to stand where their feet can dry off quickly afterwards.

Be aware that inappropriate footbathing can do more harm than good.

**ACTION** – Think carefully every time sheep are handled or moved. Does handling make the problem worse? What can be done to improve the management system?

Vaccinate – Establish immunity

There is a licensed vaccine available that can be used to treat and prevent footrot. The best results are achieved with a whole-flock vaccination programme.

The vaccination should be timed to coincide with high risk times on the farm.

Vaccination protocols can differ. One way is to use a single dose primary course, followed by six monthly boosters, or some farms may benefit from a two dose primary course.

Wear gloves when vaccinating and use a safety vaccinator to avoid self-injection, as the vaccine is hazardous to humans.

Read the product data sheet very carefully before using the vaccine.

**ACTION** – Decide with the vet if and when to vaccinate. Common times are at housing or after shearing.
DECISION TREE FOR LAMENESS

Is it scald or footrot?

- **YES**
  - Antibiotic injection and spray
  - Do not trim
  - Mark leg
  - Footbath large numbers of lambs with scald

- **NO**
  - Red/pink area between claws with white/grey pasty scum.
  - Pus, foul smell and separation of hoof horn.

Is it CODD?

- **YES**
  - Red raw lesion that starts at the top of the hoof and rapidly leads to hoof separation. Grey pasty scum, smells.

- **NO**

Is it toe granuloma?

- **YES**
  - Fleshy, strawberry-like tissue often caused by foot damage, especially over trimming.

- **NO**

Is it an abscess or white line disease?

- **YES**
  - Penetration of white line may not be visible. Pus appears at coronary band, foot can be hot and painful.

- **NO**

Is it shelly hoof?

- **YES**
  - Separation of toe and wall horn with no smell. May not cause lameness.

- **NO**

For other causes of lameness consult the vet for advice on treatment
Examine lame sheep with the vet or consultant to identify which diseases are a problem on your farm.

**CULL**
- all ewes that have been identified as being lame twice through the season or have chronic misshapen feet
- spray mark or use cull tags to identify repeat offenders and cull hard after weaning, particularly in the first year

**AVOID**
- spread at handling. Assess handling systems, gateways, tracks and troughs and work out any areas likely to encourage the incidence of foot disease
- apply lime in pens and races
- move mineral buckets and feed troughs in fields regularly

**TREAT**
- all lame sheep promptly and within three days (even if only a mild case), with the correct drug at the correct dose

**QUARANTINE**
- all incoming sheep, paying particular attention to early signs of CODD

**VACCINATE**
- if vaccinating schedule administering it at high-risk times

Review the plan throughout the year

www.fwi.co.uk/stampoutlameness

Recommendations in this leaflet are based on research conducted at Warwick University, Nottingham University, Bristol University, Liverpool University and FAI farms.