

The five-point plan for tackling lameness in sheep



Footrot and scald are the leading causes of sheep lameness in the UK, resulting in serious loss of production and financial returns to farmers, as well as being an animal welfare concern.

The five-point plan was developed by combining academic research findings with best farming practice, to create a set of practical and effective measures for farmers.

Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) target

The five-point plan is the agreed national strategy for achieving the FAWC target of reducing sheep lameness to less than 5% of the national flock by 2016 and less than 2% by 2021.

In addition, cross-compliance regulations require farmers to maintain levels at less than 5%. The five-point plan can help tackle the prevention, control and treatment of lameness and contribute to these national goals.

The five-point plan

This management plan gives farmers a clear framework to help control lameness in their flocks. It sets out to:

- Increase the sheep's natural resilience to the diseases that cause lameness
- Reduce disease challenge and spread on farm
- Improve flock immunity via vaccination

These measures together can 'tip the balance' towards having less lameness and a higher flock health status.

This method has been successfully adopted by many UK farmers. They have demonstrated that lameness reduction is achievable within a relatively short time. However, it does require long-term commitment to sustain on-going success.



The five points of the plan can be split into three areas:

- Cull to build resilience
- Treat, quarantine and avoid to reduce disease challenge
- Vaccinate to establish immunity



Getting started

The best time to start the five-point plan is post-weaning, with the aim of getting on top of any problems in the ewes over the winter. This reduces the chance of affected animals carrying and spreading disease to other ewes and lambs the following spring.

Build Resilience	Cull	Lame ewes spread disease, so an aggressive culling policy is critical in the first year of controlling lameness. Target any ewes with misshapen or chronically diseased feet, as these ewes and rams will act as a source of infection for the rest of the flock. Cull any 'repeat offenders'.
Reduce Disease Challenge	Avoid	Be aware that the bacteria spread from foot to foot via the ground, particularly in warm damp areas. The spread of infection between individual sheep can be reduced by using hydrated lime around handling and high-traffic areas at pasture. Reduce the accumulation of infection around mineral buckets or troughs by moving them regularly and think carefully about where and how sheep are handled. Try to improve underfoot conditions wherever possible.
	Treat	Disease spreads quickly so treat even mildly lame sheep as soon as possible. Rapid treatment helps stop the cycle of infection. 1. Catch - Within three days of becoming lame – the sooner the better. 2. Inspect – Clean away dirt but do not trim hoof horn. 3. Diagnose – Identify correct cause. Seek vet advice if unsure. 4. Treat – See Decision Tree on following page. 5. Mark – Affected limb and record tag number. 6. Cull – If repeat offender, mark to cull.
	Quarantine	Bought-in replacement ewes and rams present a risk of introducing different strains of footrot bacteria or contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD) into the flock. Work with the vet to write a quarantine procedure which is achievable. Inspect all new stock for signs of foot lesions, as these can be visible before sheep become lame. Consider footbathing on arrival and treat clinical cases quickly and thoroughly. Keep newcomers segregated for a minimum of 28 days and treat any problems that arise before they join the rest of the flock. Stock returning from a show or keep can also be a risk to the rest of the flock.
Establish Immunity	Vaccinate	There is a licensed vaccine available that can be used to treat and prevent footrot. The best results are achieved with a biannual whole-flock vaccination programme (including rams). Discuss a vaccination programme with the vet. Common times to administer these are at housing and after shearing.

Action / Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Cull							Cull ewes with misshapen or chronically diseased feet. Cull any 'repeat offenders' after two cases in one season.					
Quarantine							Quarantine incoming stock for a minimum of 28 days. Inspect all sheep. Treat even mild cases and footbath. If the flock is vaccinated, treat all incoming stock.					
Treat	Promptly catch and treat lame ewes and mark repeat offenders for culling.					Consider footbathing lambs to control scald.			Catch all lame ewes within three days. Treat and mark			
Avoid	Avoid spreading infection by ensuring housing and pens are as clean as possible prior to and during lambing.				Ensure handling systems are as clean as possible before every use.			Use hydrated lime, gravel or woodchip around handling and high-traffic areas to reduce the accumulation of infection. Move mineral buckets and troughs regularly.				
Vaccinate	Carry out winter vaccination with a footrot vaccine. Coincide this with winter housing or pregnancy scanning.				Carry out summer vaccination with a footrot vaccine around shearing time.						Carry out winter vaccination with a footrot vaccine. Coincide with winter housing or pregnancy scanning.	



DECISION TREE FOR LAMENESS



TREATMENT:

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

YES

Is it scald or footrot?



Red/pink area between claws with white/grey pasty scum.



Pus, foul smell and separation of hoof horn.

NO
Downward arrow

TREATMENT:

- Consult the vet for advice
- Antibiotic injection and spray
- Do not trim

YES

Is it CODD?



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

NO
Downward arrow

TREATMENT:

- Consult the vet for advice
- Use painkillers
- Use antibiotics if signs of infection
- Keep animal close to the farm to check regularly
- Cull if no response
- Can be helpful to bandage foot with copper sulphate

YES

Is it toe granuloma?



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



Penetration of white line may not be visible. Pus appears at coronary band. Foot can be hot and painful.

NO
Downward arrow

TREATMENT:

- Pare the sole as necessary to drain the abscess and reduce pressure
- Use antibiotics

YES

Is it an abscess or white line disease?



NO
Downward arrow

TREATMENT:

- If lame, trim loose horn

YES

Is it shelly hoof?



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

NO
Downward arrow

For other causes of lameness consult the vet for advice on treatment



Information supplied by University of Warwick