Sheep health

Flock Health Clubs: encouraging vets and farmers to work together to improve health and welfare
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Encouraging vets and farmers to work together to improve health and welfare

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@FlockHealth
A question I often ask sheep farmers is whether they think a sheep vet is a valued part of a sheep enterprise?

Or an unwelcome expense when things have gone wrong?
What have some sheep farmers said?

- "My vet is only interested in dairy cows"
- "Inconsistent service"
- "Vets lack expertise of sheep farming"
- "I'm concerned whether the vet gives me independent advice"
- "My vet is not interested in sheep"
- "High turnover of vets"

Sheep farmer opinions on the current and future role of veterinarians in flock health management on sheep farms: Preventive Veterinary Medicine 112 (2013) 370-377

Jasmeet Kaler a, L.E. Green b
What have some vets said in the past?

- “I’m not confident in my sheep knowledge”
- “Sheep farmers seem to know what they are doing & we can’t tell them any more”
- “It’s impossible to charge a realistic rate”
- “Our sheep farmers don’t want to engage”
- “I don’t like sheep!”

Preventative services offered by veterinarians on sheep farms in England and Wales: opinions and drivers for proactive flock health planning

Preventative Veterinary Medicine 2015
Bellet, Woodnutt, Green, Kaler
What do sheep farmers want?

A vet who likes sheep
or at least interested in them!

Advice that is reliable, robust
& totally independent

Someone who understands their business
& gives real value for money
There are two types of sheep farmer -

- I know my cost of production
- I like to get a cheap deal at the mart
- I only buy directly from a known farm
- I quarantine bought-in sheep
- I work closely with my vet & we have a plan for the flock
- I know the health status of my sheep
- I don’t want to know if there is disease in my flock
- I don’t know what it costs me but I know last year was bad!
- I don’t ask too many questions when I buy sheep
- I usually do what my Dad did
# Types of sheep flock & sheep farmer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Uses the vet:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Progressive</strong></td>
<td>• Good understanding of flock performance &amp; cost of production.</td>
<td>• proactively,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Aware of risks buying in</td>
<td>• trouble shooting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Asks appropriate health questions</td>
<td>• before problems occur</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relies on reputation &amp; health status to maintain market</td>
<td>• where it makes good business sense</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional</strong></td>
<td>• Unsure of flock performance or cost of production</td>
<td>• as necessary,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Likely to make decisions based on tradition or habit</td>
<td>• in a crisis,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unlikely to ask health questions or quarantine bought-in stock</td>
<td>• once all other options exhausted</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Relies on reputation &amp; good luck to maintain market</td>
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- **Vet saves money!**
- **Vet costs money!**
What is good sheep farming about?
...producing a quality product
.....sustainable land management
.......responsible use of medicines
“right product to the right animals at the right time”
“as little as possible but as much as necessary”

Good flock health planning is essential
Flock Health Planning

- **Scab, lice & flies** - what to use to which sheep & when to use it
- **Lameness control** - needs ongoing plan
- **Flock Fertility** - needs the right ewes in lamb at the right time
- **Vaccinations** - what to use to which sheep & when to use it
- **Lambing** - protocols to prevent disease & keep them alive!
- **Ewe nutrition** - forage analysis & planning required
- **Lamb growth** - optimum for sale at a good price
- **Bought-in sheep** - needs a plan to prevent disease incursion
- **Worms, Fluke coccidia** - what to use to which sheep & when to use it

- **Tupping**, **Scanning**, **Housing**, **Lambing**, **Suckling**, **Weaning**, **Sales**
- **Autumn**, **Winter**, **Spring**, **Summer**
What are the key drivers of sheep flock profitability?

Maximum flock output
- Maximise lambs sold (kg of carcase) per ewe (or per hectare of land)

Minimum flock costs
- Examine fixed & variable costs - efficiencies
- Note - replacements, feed, vet & med

Maximum product value
- High value lambs sold at optimum point of production to target market

But less than 14% of sheep farmers calculate their profitability or know their cost of production!
How does good flock health affect profitability?

Minimum flock costs
Look carefully at vet & med!

#spend on prevention
- invest wisely
- take good advice

#save on costs
- treatment costs
- loss of production
What is important?

What can we control?
What is a Flock Health Club?

- Discussion group/business club run & facilitated by vet
- ~12 producers from similar farm types
- Structured meetings with lots of practical/hands-on
- Benchmarking flock performance & financials
- Trust & commitment builds with time
- Low monthly subscriptions with bolt-ons/deals
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What’s in it for the practice?</th>
<th>What’s in it for the farmers?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourages closer contact with sheep farmer clients</td>
<td>Cost effective veterinary advice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small but steady sheep income to the practice</td>
<td>Spreads the cost of the vet for small flocks</td>
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<td>Active preventative health care on sheep farms</td>
<td>Peer support &amp; learning</td>
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What sort of clubs are running?

- Early lambers Flock Health Club
- Small holders Flock Health Club
- Pedigree Flock Health Club
- Large Flock Health Club
- Hill Flock Health Club
“The enthusiasm of our sheep clients for a Flock Health Club was really inspiring to see. At the end of the year the members were unanimous in their wish to keep the group going”
Dan Stevenson, LLM Farm Vets

“I’m amazed at how much we have learnt tonight. I had no idea there was so much that I didn’t know.”
Shropshire sheep farmer

“We’ve not had this many farmers to a dairy meeting before!”
Charlie Lambert, LLM Farm Vets

“The best thing from our Flock Health Club has been to see sheep farmers working together comparing their basic flock data and highlighting areas for improvement.”
Will Barker, Castle Veterinary Surgeons
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of meeting</th>
<th>Example meeting title</th>
<th>Example subject matter</th>
<th>Figures to collect in &amp; discuss</th>
<th>Figures to collect next time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late Summer</td>
<td>Are your rams up to the job?</td>
<td>Ram fertility</td>
<td>Nothing in year one</td>
<td>Mating figures only in first year</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t buy in trouble</td>
<td>Flock protection, quarantine treatments</td>
<td>Up-to weaning figures in subsequent years</td>
<td>Sales &amp; retention in subsequent years</td>
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<td>Don’t waste a cull ewe</td>
<td>Culling – who, why, how many? Iceberg diseases</td>
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<td>Thinking of next year’s lambs</td>
<td>Ewe body condition, fertility planning/manipulation, Abortion control</td>
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<td>Autumn/back end</td>
<td>Can you afford to have lame sheep?</td>
<td>Lameness control – diagnosis, 5 point plan, cost benefits of control measures</td>
<td>Mating figures only in first year</td>
<td>Scanning figures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What’s on the menu this winter?</td>
<td>Forage analysis, diet planning, best value options</td>
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<td>Putting the tups out</td>
<td>Ewe condition, tupping management, embryo implantation, Border disease</td>
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<td>Don’t let the little beasties win</td>
<td>Risk assessments &amp; control of fluke, sheep scab, lice</td>
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<td>Autumn/back end figures</td>
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<td>Winter pre-lambing</td>
<td>Getting it right in the lambing shed</td>
<td>Colostrum, watery mouth, joint ill</td>
<td>Scanning figures</td>
<td>Lambing figures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Are your ewes fit for lambing?</td>
<td>Ewe condition, metabolic issues, prolapses, mastitis</td>
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<td>Every lamb counts</td>
<td>Lamb post mortems, hypothermia</td>
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<td>Care of the pregnant ladies</td>
<td>Ewe condition &amp; nutrition, consider empties, abortion control</td>
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<td>Grass growth &amp; management Gut worms &amp; anthelmintic resistance</td>
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<td>Worm &amp; fly control</td>
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<td>Spring/early summer</td>
<td>Getting lambs to grow – pre-weaning</td>
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Lambs counted at scanning time

Lambs born alive

Lambs turned out

Lambs weaned

Lambs sold

Wastage & lost potential
There is a small army of keen enthusiastic, knowledgeable & engaging sheep vets out there

Make sure you have one involved with your flock!

@FlockHealth