



A Guide to Good
Practice

Managing Animal Health

On Upland and Moorland
Commons

The Federation of Yorkshire Commoners and Moorland Graziers aims:

1. To be a representative voice to support and protect the commons
2. To support better collaboration amongst commoners
3. To ensure that hill farming on common land is a worthwhile and viable activity
4. To promote positive management of the environment by commoners
5. To improve public understanding of the commons
6. To these ends, to engage with all interested parties to put forward the case of the commoners in a vigorous and constructive manner.

The Federation has prepared a series of 'Guides to Good Practice' which are intended to help commoners to deal with selected key issues. The Guides aim to share experience from different commons and to help commoners understand how others approach key issues.

Guides to Good Practice have been prepared for the following subjects:

Vegetation Management	Direct Marketing
Management Planning	<u>Managing Animal Health</u>
Agri-environment Schemes	Commercial Marketing

The guides to Vegetation Management, Management Planning, Agri-environment Schemes and Marketing consists of a 2 page summary together with the main guide, while the guides to Managing Animal Health and Commercial Marketing consist of main guide only.

It is intended that the Guides will be updated on a regular basis, as new information is gathered and new

policies or advice are introduced. Please contact the administrator of the Federation with any comments or suggestions.

The other Guides are available from:

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This guide is intended as a useful source of advice and information for members of the Federation of Yorkshire Commoners and Moorland Graziers, and others, who are concerned with the health and welfare of the sheep on the common.

1. There are many considerations and challenges to the health and welfare of the sheep on the commons. These vary considerably from common to common.

In order to maximise sheep health, welfare and productivity commoners must come together to prioritise aims, objectives and courses of action. This guide highlights the areas of particular relevance for common graziers which should be incorporated into flock health plans and developed with veterinary input.

2. Strong communication, cooperation and commitment to disease and parasite control programmes by all who exercise their grazing rights on the common will be necessary for the programmes to be effective.

In many cases, treatments will only be effective if coordinated with all graziers and it may also be cheaper. Communication and cooperation over gathering and treatment dates will help to reduce the incidence of re-exposure to disease in untreated sheep acting as reservoirs of infection. Only healthy animals should be turned out onto common ground. Changes in

working practices will be necessary for some or all of the farms involved.

3. The first priority for disease control should be biosecurity actions to protect against devastating disease - a secure farm gate policy is needed.

It is best to think of all the individual flocks with access to common grazing as part of one extended flock. An infectious disease affecting any one of the animals has the potential to spread to any other sheep within the 'common flock'.

Biosecurity is only as strong as the weakest farms that use that common so cooperation is essential. A closed flock policy is ideal, with all replacement stock being home bred. However in some situations, especially in cross-bred flocks, this is not practical and replacement stock is bought in. It is essential to know the health status of flocks from which replacements are sourced.

Many extensively grazed flocks enjoy a relatively high health status. Do not lose this privilege by buying in disease, which once established may be very difficult to eradicate and may increase production costs considerably.

In any situation where new animals are purchased, including breeding tups, a period of quarantine and routine treatment must be observed. Such measures also apply to breeding females returning from away wintering. You should seek veterinary advice regarding any tests or treatments required during this period.

Foot and Mouth Disease can only be controlled by effective biosecurity.

Maedi Visna and anthelmintic resistant worms can cause serious problems and are most likely to occur as a result of moving bought-in stock onto the common. Both are far more common than most people

think. Prevention is important as once they are here you won't get rid of them.

Enzootic abortion usually arrives on the farm from bought-in stock and infection is spread from ewe to ewe or from ewe to lamb by infected afterbirths, lambs or vaginal discharges at lambing. Replacements should be kept separate until lambing is complete and aborting ewes should be isolated from the rest of the flock.

4. The second priority for disease control on commons is to cooperate over the treatment of serious diseases which require coordinated actions by all commoners.

Lameness

Lameness is a major welfare concern and may severely limit production in affected sheep. Lamé sheep cannot cover enough ground on the fell to find the best grazing so affected sheep will lose condition very quickly. Individuals with foot rot may act as a source of infection to others, especially when gathering around feeding areas. Lamé sheep should therefore not be put to the fell and should be sorted off for treatment at each gather.

Foot bathing is very effective at controlling foot rot. However, if routine foot bathing is not controlling the problem, the flock may be infected with contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD). This requires a different treatment protocol and advice should be sought. Some farms may choose to vaccinate tups against foot rot. Whenever the flock is gathered for other routine procedures take the opportunity to trim overgrown hooves.

The low stocking rates and acid soil conditions on many commons are unfavourable conditions for foot rot spread. Make the most of this by only turning out healthy feet.

Sheep scab

Sheep scab is a distressing condition affecting all ages of sheep. It has a strong foothold in areas of common grazing due to incomplete gathers and mixing of treated and untreated flocks. The welfare and production implications are massive. It is important to remember that sheep may be affected all year round, although signs are more commonly seen in the winter when conditions in the fleece encourage mite activity.

Infected lambs have reduced growth rates and ewes may lose so much condition that their fertility and ability to maintain pregnancy is compromised. Tup fertility may be similarly affected. Wool and skin are severely damaged.

There is a tendency on some farms for tups to be forgotten about when routine preventative treatments are carried out on the rest of the flock. This must be avoided at all cost. At tupping time, a tup with scab could potentially infect every ewe he serves.

A coordinated approach to scab control is essential and a range of dips and injections are available. The duration of protection against re-infection varies considerably, as does the time taken for a treated sheep to become non-infectious. Scab mites can survive off the sheep for up to 17 days. If the duration of protection offered by the product is less than 17 days there is potential for treatment breakdown.

Commoners must decide whether they require endoparasite control combined with scab control. The method of administration must be considered; some farmers may find injecting more practical than dipping or vice versa. Currently the only plunge dips effective against scab contain diazaton (OP) as high-cis cypermethrins have recently been withdrawn. Sheep showers are not recognised as effective in treatment or control of scab.

Farmers must use the control method best suited to the specific needs of their common. The specific directions for the chosen product must be followed. Cooperation amongst commoners is the key to the control and eradication of sheep scab nationally.

Ticks

Unlike the scab mite, ticks have a complex life cycle with a range of hosts on which they feed. It is the diseases transmitted by the tick at feeding which represent the greatest risk to sheep; tickborne fever (TBF), tick pyaemia and louping ill.

The majority of the tick's life is spent in the cover of moist vegetation characteristic of many of our commons. This makes eradication impractical. Instead, strategic control measures should be incorporated in the common's ectoparasite control program to coincide with the feeding activity.

Careful grazing management is essential to allow controlled exposure of sheep grazing in tick areas to allow immunity to develop. In some areas, lambs may require prophylactic antibiotics against TBF at turn out and vaccination against louping ill may be necessary. Be aware ticks could become a problem in areas that have previously been tick-free due to our changing climate.

Worms

Internal parasites can be hard to control where sheep graze the same land every year, such as the common. Some stomach worms are not a problem for fit adult sheep, unless other disease or malnutrition lowers their natural resistance to them. Worming of adult ewes at or as near as possible to lambing time will reduce pasture contamination. An annual rotation of anthelmintics between the three classes of drugs is essential in sheep systems to prevent resistance.

Liver fluke

Liver fluke is a major cause of ill thrift and poor productivity in affected ewes and lambs. Liver fluke have historically only affected stock on the wetter west of the country. However, with climate change bringing wetter summers and milder winters, fluke is emerging in previously unaffected areas.

Before sheep can pick up fluke, the parasite must have completed a stage of its life cycle in the water snail; this is why fluke is seen in wetter areas. On in-bye land it may be possible to fence off boggy areas, fill in water-logged wheel ruts and improve drainage. These measures will rarely be practical on the common.

Veterinary confirmation should be sought if fluke is suspected. The most appropriate treatment will depend on the stage of disease; if acute disease is present triclabendazole treatment will be necessary to kill immature larvae as they migrate through the liver. At this early stage fluke eggs will not be present in faecal samples. A range of drugs are available against the adult fluke present in chronic disease. In problem areas, a regular dosing program will be needed.

5. The third priority for disease control is to treat serious diseases which can be controlled effectively without coordinated treatments on all farms.

Of the infectious causes of abortion, enzootic (chlamydial) abortion is the greatest risk to sheep on the commons. The chlamydial agent survives for a long time in abortion material allowing other sheep on the common to become infected. Eradication is not feasible given the current level of infection in the local sheep population. Vaccination of breeding ewes before they are exposed to the agent is the only effective way to prevent it.

Clostridial disease, pasteurella and orf can be controlled by vaccination of at risk animals on the home farms. All ewes should be vaccinated against clostridial diseases, and vaccinated against pasteurella if it is a problem. Bought-in stock should be given two injections 4 to 6 weeks apart in autumn to ensure full immunity and all sheep should receive an annual booster. The annual booster for in lamb ewes should be given at 4 to 6 weeks before lambing to give passive immunity to clostridial diseases to new born lambs. Where orf vaccination is practiced, animals can remain infective for some time.

Tick borne diseases are most effectively controlled by reducing exposure to ticks (i.e. controlling tick populations). Louping ill in particular can cause serious losses even in native/hefted sheep. Vaccination should be considered before lambs are exposed to ticks.

6. Scrapie is a concern in terms of animal welfare and economic effect. It is also politically important as it is one of the transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, which include BSE.

Scrapie is a notifiable disease for which there is no vaccine and no cure. Suspected cases should be reported to the Animal Health Divisional Office. If Scrapie is identified the infected animals will be

culled and there may be implications for the whole common.

When a case of Scrapie has been confirmed, the flock will be required to join the Scrapie Flocks Scheme and all sheep will be blood tested. The blood test does not confirm the presence of the disease but does test for Scrapie resistance (Scrapie Genotyping). Certain sheep exposed to Scrapie are more susceptible to getting the disease. Restrictions will be applied on sheep that can be used for breeding on the holding or be sold for breeding, for human consumption, and some may have to be destroyed depending on their relative resistance or susceptibility. Compensation is paid for culled animals.

Flocks which export breeding sheep throughout the EU must have their flocks monitored under the Scrapie Monitoring Scheme.

7. Even fit, healthy sheep need some high energy supplement to enable them to survive on the coarse vegetation on the commons, during periods when this is all that is available.

Although some form of energy supplement is required at certain times of year, this needs to be managed carefully, to avoid disturbing heafs.

In extreme weather conditions supplementary forage is also required if the sheep are to stay fit and healthy. However, supplementary feeding can lead to damage to vegetation by trampling and poaching, which is particularly relevant to designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Feeders should be placed on the most resistant surfaces and moved regularly.

8. There are a number of measures that need to be taken and preparations that need to be made before and during lambing. Lambing brings sheep together which means there is a risk of diseases spreading.

Ewes should ideally be vaccinated 4 to 6 weeks in advance of lambing to ensure that there is less chance of infections spreading when sheep are congregated for lambing and to ensure immunity is passed to lambs.

Ewes should be fed according to body condition and litter size to ensure strong healthy lambs and a rich supply of colostrum and milk. New born lambs should receive adequate colostrums in the first two hours after birth. All navels should be treated with iodine but castrating and tailing should be left for 24 hours.

Watery mouth is caused by ingestion of E.coli. Lack of Colostrum is a major factor as it helps combat bacteria infections. Vaccination of ewes pre-lambing should be considered if the problem occurs yearly.

9. The Federation of Commoners and Moorland Graziers may be able to provide further information and can arrange to bring people together to discuss the issues.

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