

**SUSTAINABLE CONTROL OF PARASITES IN SHEEP****PRESS RELEASE****Tuesday 15th October 2019 – No embargo****SUSTAINABLE CONTROL OF PARASITES IN SHEEP (SCOPS)  
and CONTROL OF CATTLE PARASITES SUSTAINABLY (COWS)  
JOINT PRESS RELEASE****Tuesday 15th October 2019 - no embargo****Sheep and cattle farmers urged to start testing for liver fluke  
this autumn**

The Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) and Control of Cattle Parasites Sustainably (COWS) groups are urging sheep and cattle farmers to monitor for liver fluke this autumn.

Speaking on behalf of SCOPS, Lesley Stubbings says: *"Last autumn and winter the levels of fluke were relatively low, but many areas have been wetter this year and early indications are that there will be more liver fluke around this season. Reports to date show there is already some disease in high risk areas and, with experts warning the challenge will be patchy, the need to use testing is greater than ever."*

The provisional [NADIS fluke forecast for autumn 2019](#) indicates high risk in Scotland, North West England and North Wales, and moderate risk in Northern Ireland. John Graham Brown of NADIS says: *"While the predicted risk may be low in some areas, local conditions are very important. Farms in these regions that have consistently wet, boggy grazing, must assess their risk carefully in the coming months. Autumn fluke risk is also dependent on eggs being present on the pasture, so areas that were grazed by infected cattle or sheep earlier in the season should be considered a risk."*

Speaking on behalf of COWS, Diana Williams of Liverpool University says: *"Farmers now have some very useful testing tools available to them, including a blood test. At this early stage in the season, blood testing this year's lambs gives us the earliest indication of a challenge, because it only takes about four weeks after infection for antibodies to be present. If they test positive, we know liver fluke are present and treatment is indicated, because they can only have been infected this summer/autumn."*

testing can also avoid unnecessary treatments If animals are not infected with liver fluke. This saves money and time and helps us protect the few medicines we have available to combat this parasite."

#### Updates from around the UK

- **Rebecca Mearns of Biobest Laboratories:**

"We have only had a few positive coproantigen ELISA tests so far this season, but this may be because it is quite early in the season and the flukes in the animals are still too immature. It is really important to consider re-testing in four to six weeks if this is the case. In contrast, the blood test has shown some high positives in parts of Wales from as early as the end of July. In dairy cattle we've also seen some high antibody levels in bulk milk samples in some herds and, with housing for cattle now starting, it is important to seek advice on appropriate treatment. Where results have been negative, it is important these flocks consider repeating the screening and monitor abattoir feedback to determine the need to treat. It's always worth considering liver fluke as a cause of poor performance, especially when other causes have been ruled out, and we can run the test on the same samples used for trace element testing so this saves getting the vet out twice."

- **Ben Strugnell, Farm Post Mortems Ltd, County Durham:** "I saw a case of acute fluke on a wet farm in County Durham in late September, which is much earlier than I would expect. This could suggest the challenge will be earlier and heavier than last year, so vigilance is required. In addition to serology, post mortem examinations of any sudden deaths are the most sensitive indicators of acute liver fluke at this stage in the season."
- **Philip Skuce, Moredun, on monitoring work in Argyll:** "From the initial work we've done in the West of Scotland this year, we've seen animals that are positive on the blood test. However, they have been negative for faecal indicators (coproantigen and/or faecal egg count) because the flukes are still immature. This highlights the need to be careful if you are relying solely on faecal tests. It might just be a case 'not yet', so be prepared to re-test to avoid getting caught out. It's very important to understand what each test tells us about the liver fluke challenge in any given year and to make appropriate decisions in terms of whether to treat or not, when to treat and what product to use."
- **Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health Ltd:** "If lambs are not growing as expected, as well as considering feed quality and quantity, either worms or liver fluke are important to consider. The blood test for fluke, which can be run on samples taken for trace element monitoring, is particularly helpful in lambs. It is also a heads-up for the rest of the flock if the results are positive."



Watch out for regular updates from SCOPS and COWS as the autumn and winter progresses – and find more at [www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk) and [www.cattleparasites.org.uk](http://www.cattleparasites.org.uk).

#### Notes to editors: -

- This press release is issued by National Sheep Association (NSA) on behalf of SCOPS and COWS. For more information contact Katie James, NSA Communications Officer, on 01684 892661 or [katie@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:katie@nationalsheep.org.uk).
- SCOPS is an industry led group that works in the interest of the UK sheep industry. It recognises that, left unchecked, anthelmintic resistance is one of the biggest challenges to the future health and profitability of the sector. Find out more at [www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk).

control of both internal and external parasites. Find out more at  
[www.cattleparasites.org.uk](http://www.cattleparasites.org.uk).

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