

Keeping on top of worms

By Mark Ross

Managing internal parasites (worms) is one of the biggest challenges that farmers face in producing healthy stock.

According to research, there is widespread resistance to several drench families in sheep, cattle, deer, and goats on New Zealand farms. This is estimated to cost farmers in excess of \$20 million per annum.

Resistance can develop to any drench. So every farmer needs a plan to manage the risk of worm resistance on their farm. Animal welfare and productivity in the future will rely on farm plans that are developed today to control the emergence of drench resistance on farms.

There are a limited number of drench chemicals available, and with no new drench chemicals likely to be available in New Zealand in the near future, it is very important that drench use is incorporated into an overall farm parasite management plan so that drenches available now remain effective for many years to come.

An Industry initiative, Wormwise, has developed a national worm management strategy which provides simple and important strategies for farmers in managing internal parasites in their animals.

Farmers, veterinarians, veterinary pharmaceutical industry representatives and parasitologists were involved in developing the strategy which established, among other things, a set of agreed principles for managing internal parasites.

Representatives of the contributing organisations meet regularly under the banner of the Wormwise Implementation Group (WIG). The participating organisations are Agcarm, Beef and Lamb NZ, New Zealand Veterinary Association, the Ministry for Primary Industries, and a farmer representative.

Wormwise is an example of industry taking a collective responsibility to use anthelmintics responsibly and sustainably, by establishing best management practices.

The aim of the initiative is to ensure that farmers receive well-researched, up-to-date advice agreed on by the major players in the industry. Wormwise achieves this by managing and integrating research work, education, communication and extension services for farmers, veterinarians, key influencers and retailers.

Farmers should review their drench use and overall parasite management over the last few years. To determine the resistance status of the different worm species present on their farms, a drench test should also be done.

Each farm is different, so veterinarians and animal health advisors play an important role in the development of farm-specific animal health plans. These plans must be flexible, and be regularly revised as indicators of stock performance. They should also monitor signs and symptoms of parasitism.

Drenches are significant tools to help farmers manage worms on their farms and they need to be used wisely. Unfortunately, as resistance develops drenching becomes less effective. So it is important that farmers reassess their worm management practices on a regular basis

Animal health companies who manufacture and distribute anthelmintic drenches, to treat worms, want farmers to use their products for optimal productivity and animal welfare, in a responsible and sustainable fashion.

There are simple questions that every farmer should ask before reaching for the drench gun:

1. Do you know the level of worm burden in the animals you are intending to drench?
2. Do you know if your drench is effective?
3. Are you using the most appropriate product?
4. All drenching involves risk. Have you considered the risks?

Farmers should work with their veterinarian to assess the internal parasite problem and develop the best strategy for managing it. The strong collaboration and partnerships that have delivered Wormwise are important to the continued growth and productivity of the pastoral sectors.

- Mark Ross is chief executive of Agcarm, the industry association for crop protection and animal health.