

04.10.22

Keep Sheep Scab Out - Farmers offered free testing and treatment service for sheep scab

Over thirty flocks from across Northern Ireland have signed up so far to a ‘ground-breaking’ project to tackle sheep scab in NI being undertaken by AFBI, the NI Sheep Scab Group, Moredun Research Institute and Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI). The project entitled “Factors influencing endemic disease in the NI sheep flock” has been funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) will allow up to 100 flocks to join the scheme.

This grassroots initiative, launched in September, focuses on farmers, vets and other industry professionals uniting to tackle the devastating disease which has blighted the sheep farming community and their flocks for decades.

Scab is a form of allergic dermatitis caused by a hypersensitivity reaction to the faeces of the sheep scab mite (*Psoroptes ovis*). The mite can survive for up to 17 days off the sheep so can be spread for example by wool tags on handling facilities or on fencing. The disease is a significant welfare concern for affected sheep as well as an economic concern for farmers and the wool industry. There are limitations to some of the treatment options, and resistance has been reported in GB to some of the products licenced to treat and prevent scab.

Clinical Signs of Sheep Scab may be:

- Restlessness
- Rubbing against fence posts
- Soiled/ stained areas of wool
- Head tossing/ biting
- Pulled wool appearance leading to wool loss.

The project entails an on-farm visit, giving the farm’s local veterinary surgeon the opportunity to diagnose and treat any cases of sheep scab. The veterinary surgeon will also gather information about the outbreak and take time to address other concerns and queries that farmers may have about their flock’s health.

Paul Crawford, Project Coordinator, stated, “We hope this project will act as a catalyst for change and eventually lead to the creation of a bespoke eradication plan. But in order to get to that stage, we first have to obtain relevant data.”

Despite currently being a notifiable disease in Northern Ireland, little research has been undertaken into sheep scab within Northern Ireland. Information from this project will be crucial to inform future sheep scab control and eradication plans.

If you would like to find out more information regarding the scheme, please phone AHWNI on 07517 599497/ 028 7963 9333 or email info@animalhealthni.com.