

## **Farmers show keen interest in a NI Sheep Scab control programme**

There was an excellent turnout of farmers and industry stakeholders on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> November at Hilltown Sale Yard to discuss the ongoing issue of sheep scab in the NI flock. The multidisciplinary research team who presented at the event highlighted the need for combined efforts to contain the infection, for the benefit of not just the sheep and the farmers themselves but also to reduce anthelmintic resistance, and for the wider environmental gains.

The event, which was facilitated by Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI), showcased the achievements of the recent Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) funded NI sheep scab project. Dr Stew Burgess, who leads the Sheep scab research group at the Moredun Research Institute in Edinburgh, outlined the control schemes that have been in place in England and the Scottish Islands, highlighting the progress being made and the support structures and funding that underlie the projects. During the evening, a Q&A session involved Dr Burgess and panellists from the NI Sheep Scab group, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and AHWNI.

Speaking afterwards, Dr Burgess said that the packed audience had shown a tremendous interest in the current projects in GB, with a view to learning from them. Dr Burgess stated, “The recent project has demonstrated that scab is present in every county in NI and that collaboration across industry with underpinning financial support is the key to success in projects like this. However, sheep farmers want to move to the next stage of controlling this disease, via a coordinated programme of support to enable strategic timing of treatments in tandem with neighbouring flocks.”

Paul Crawford, Chair of the NI Sheep scab group commented that the high level of interest shown by the attendance at the meeting highlighted the need for ongoing, sustainable support so farmers can help their flocks and control the disease, stating, “We need policymakers to accept these results and to act on them to achieve lasting change”.

Dr Adewale Adenuga and Dr Aurelie Aubry of AFBI in their presentation highlighted that, “Events like this are extremely important in facilitating open discussions with the industry and stakeholders, where everyone has a shared goal of driving down the levels of endemic diseases such as sheep scab. The results of the AFBI questionnaire, which was issued during the project to hundreds of flock owners, have demonstrated in particular that any intervention aimed at controlling sheep scab in NI will benefit from the promotion of positive attitudes towards blood testing for subclinical diagnosis of the disease. It is vital that everyone involved in the sheep industry in NI plays their part in this common effort to make a difference to sheep welfare through working towards reduced prevalence.”