



## Sheep Scab Initiative

### Bulletin #8

#### Sheep Scab in Northern Ireland – The Need for Regional Control

Sheep scab has become a significant burden for the NI sheep industry in recent years, as it risks affecting animal welfare and the reputation of the industry. There is a need for concerted action to control the spread and impact of infection. This would improve animal health, reduce the need for treatments, reduce farmer costs and also decrease the selection pressure for anthelmintic resistance.

#### Key Issues affecting control:

- Undiagnosed cases/ reservoirs of infection
- Variable farmer action to deal with active infection/ spread between contiguous flocks
- High level of movements, eg due to fragmented holdings, conacre, winter grazing (store lambs)
- Inadequate quarantining of incoming stock, long meat withdrawal for quarantine scab treatment
- Transmission 'bottlenecks' eg shearing, common grazing, shows, marts, transport, scanning
- Use of ineffective showers/ jettors with the risk of diazinon resistance.
- Costs - prophylactic treatment is only cost-effective if the risk of scab infection is higher than average, or the cost of treatment is lower<sup>1</sup>.

**For regional control to be developed, the NI sheep industry will need to work in a co-ordinated way with multiple stakeholders, including producer groups, organic farmers, suppliers of treatment and control products (SQPs), veterinary surgeons, markets and paraprofessionals (scanners, shearers and mobile dip operators).**

Given cost issues, economic incentives, such as subsidising the cost of dips or introducing penalties, would be required to foster commitment to a control plan. A coordinated plan can generate success

#### Possible interventions:

##### Programme level

- Biosecurity, diagnosis and treatment strategies to be agreed and publicised
- Government involvement, to encourage compliance with the control measures
- Publicity from multiple sources, to encourage best practice and deliver educational materials (for example through subsidised schemes, sheep events and farmer training groups)
- Consideration of strengths and weaknesses of 'notifiable' status and anonymous reporting

##### For example, farm level measures could include:

- Identification of individually affected and clusters of affected farms
- Synchronisation of treatment at optimum time
- Cleaning and disinfecting of handling facilities and trailers in shared situations and between different batches of sheep.

if there is farmer cooperation with control measures in a particular period of time, such as in the autumn after substantial movements have taken place and before the mating season.

Ultimately sheep scab control needs to have simultaneous involvement of and cooperation between farmers in affected cluster areas as part of a regional control plan.

<sup>1</sup>Nixon, 2017