Make worming decisions now

By Sara Gregson

The National Animal Disease Information Service has predicted a high risk of liver fluke disease in north, west and central Scotland, west Wales and Cornwall, following one of the wettest summers on record in 2017.

Eastern Scotland, parts of southwest and northern England have been described as medium risk.

Recent reports from SAC Veterinary Services, the Animal and Plant Health Agency and abattoirs across the country support this, having seen more cases of chronic and sub-acute liver fluke disease.

Dr Phil Skuce, principal scientist at Moredun Research Institute in Scotland, which is a stakeholder of the Controlling Worms Sustainably (COWS) initiative, says: “We are definitely seeing the legacy of a very wet summer last year.

“Many of us have also had a lot of snow. But actually snow insulates eyes on the ground and rarely finishes off the intermediate host mud snails.

“Where cattle were housed earlier than normal and have stayed indoors longer, this should reduce the risk of infection from animals eating over-wintered cysts.”

Dr Skuce says now is a good time to treat cattle which were not treated when housed with a wormer which kills adult fluke (more than 30 weeks old), using products such as albendazole, clorsulon or oxyclozanide. This will prevent stock shedding eggs onto the pasture at turnout, which could go on to infect mud snails later in the year.

Gut and lungworms

Dr Dave Bartley, of Moredun, agrees snow is unlikely to have killed all gut and lungworm larvae on pastures this winter and there is likely to be a reservoir of infection in the fields.

“Snow does not give the big clear out of worm larvae one might expect,” says Dr Bartley. “But I do see slow grass growth as a significant problem.”

“Poor nutrition plays a very big part in parasite establishment in animals, leaving them open to much larger infections. Even with lower larval numbers, cattle on a poor plane of nutrition can be more susceptible.”

When using anthelmintics, farmers should follow the COWS best practice principles to ensure they work properly and do not encourage the arrival and/or development of resistant worms.

Use grazing strategies which protect the cleanest grazing for the youngest cattle, such as leader follower or grazing silage after-maths and follow the five ‘R’s. Use the right product, give it to the right animals, at the right time, at the right dose rate and administer it in the right way.

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