

Press Release from COWS Control of Worms Sustainably



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Farmers not getting full picture on wormers when they buy

Cattle farmers are not receiving all of the appropriate information they need to make evidence-based wormer choices, regardless of whether they buy from vets, Suitably Qualified Persons (SQP) or vet pharmacists, according to new research, funded by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD).

The study led by Prof. Jacqui Matthews of Moredun Research Institute (Edinburgh) involving an online survey of 330 sheep and cattle farmers, indicated high awareness (greater than 96%) amongst farmers of wormer resistance, but a disconnect between this and what they are doing to prevent it happening on their farms.

“Based on what farmers told us is being discussed when they buy wormers, it is clear there is some room for improvement in the advice being delivered on sustainable parasite management,” says Prof. Matthews.

“Farmers should be taking more evidence-based, rather than blanket approaches to treatment, and carry out best practice actions, as outlined by groups such as Control of Worms Sustainably in cattle (COWS).

“When asked about aspects of best practice, many respondents stated that these were not discussed at the point of wormer sale.

“For example, depending on the species farmed, 21-24% of farmers said they ‘rarely or never’ discussed weighing animals to calculate dose and regarding calibrating equipment 31-39% of farmers said they discussed this ‘rarely or never’. Between 29-49% stated that quarantine and FEC testing was ‘rarely or never’ discussed.

“Yet these practices have a part to play in protecting the wormers farmers have left to choose from. Applying best practice in wormer selection and application is crucial, as there are no new wormer types being developed in the short to medium term.”

Cattle-only farmers tended to view ‘convenience’ factors, such as ‘ease of administration’, as more important than those farmers who managed sheep-only or a mixture of sheep and cattle. Although not a significant difference, cattle-only farmers showed a higher tendency to consider previous experience with a wormer as important in product selection.

Few of the cattle farmers surveyed were dosing based on the results of faecal egg count tests, with many of these never having performed efficacy tests – to check whether a treatment had worked.

“All prescribers must give consistent and clear advice on wormer use at the point of sale, to ensure farmer customers use them in a manner that will not encourage resistance,” says Prof. Matthews. “The recent strengthening of the farm-SQP qualification for dispensing wormers, delivered by AMTRA, will hopefully help improve this in future.”

The results of the survey have been published in the July 2018 issue of Preventative Veterinary Medicine: (Easton S, Pinchbeck GL, Bartley DJ, Hodgkinson JE, Matthews JB. 2018. A survey of experiences of UK cattle and sheep farmers with anthelmintic prescribers; are best practice principles being deployed at farm level? Prev. Vet. Med. 155: 27-37).

The COWS advice on best practice for worming cattle can be found at www.cattleparasites.org.uk

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