

## Spring begins the new production season and is a critical time when worms can seriously impact production.

Good stock management over spring can influence how stock handle later worm challenges. Farmers can manage production risks and drench resistance threats by matching drench inputs to the level of pressure the animals are under.

Each stock class has a different level of risk over spring.



### Breeding ewes

Adequately fed ewes with reasonable body condition scores are unlikely to have a production response after drenching. Trials show drenching ewes at docking time can be moderately selective for drench resistance.

The Wormwise recommendation is to limit drenching to ewes which are in very light condition and/or are underfed. Also remember many high performing ewes with low condition at docking are healthy and as long as these ewes can be fed adequately there is little need for drenching. For more information on adequate feed refer to ForageMaster™, FeedSmart™ or FlockMaster™.

Avoid treating the whole flock to reduce the risk of selecting for drench resistance.

### Ewe hoggets

The drench needs of ewe hoggets in the spring hinges around their lambing and nutritional status.

For dry ewe hoggets, spring shearing is a convenient time to drench. Their drench response depends on winter treatments, body condition and how well they have been fed, or are going to be fed. Farmers will make good decisions by undertaking some faecal egg counts (FECs) and monitoring.

For ewe hoggets that lambed, their susceptibility to worms is increased by giving birth and their need for drench protection is high. Consider body condition, feed and if the hogget had multiples or a single before drenching.

Ewe hoggets usually lamb later in spring, when feed is usually less limiting, so body condition and pregnancy status (twins versus singles) are likely to be more important. Therefore lighter condition twinning ewe hoggets are more likely to give a better production response to a persistent acting drench product than a single bearing ewe hogget in good condition.

Even for lambing ewe hoggets there is value in adjusting the level of drench input to the level of risk from both a cost benefit and a sustainability point of view.

**Before drenching any animals, farmers should ask themselves three key questions.**

- 1. Do you know whether or not the drench you intend to use, is effective?**
- 2. Have you carried out a Faecal Egg Count Reduction Test (FECRT)?**
- 3. Do you know the levels and type of worm burden in the animals you are intending to drench?**

## Weaned lambs – farmers may wish to consider the following:



- **What drench will be used?**  
If no drench testing data is available, plan to have a test done on lambs in the summer. In the absence of any testing data use a combination drench.
- **What monitoring will be necessary?**  
If the lambs are on “clean” grazing areas it may be possible to trigger drenching by monitoring with faecal egg counts.
- **What paddocks are lambs going to be weaned to?**  
If lambs are being weaned onto lambing areas, then plan to share the grazing area with ewes. If weaning onto “clean” areas, plan how to avoid drenching lambs directly onto that area, or to leave some lambs undrenched.
- **Check drenching equipment.**  
It is important that drench guns are delivering the correct dose for the animal’s weight.

### Suckling lambs

Suckling lambs are well protected from the effect of worms because of their age and diet. The expected gain from drenching suckling lambs is probably greater than what eventuates in many cases. A reduction in dags after drenching suckling lambs does not mean that the lambs have grown faster. The level of selection pressure for drench resistance from such a drench is unknown, but it is real.

Making the decision on whether or not to drench lambs, should be based on what worms are present (e.g. *Nematodirus* in South Island lambs are a high risk), and the likely protection the lambs will be getting.

### Remember

- Do not drench adult stock routinely
- Worms are only one reason stock may be thin or scouring - make sure you know what you are treating
- Drenching intervals should never be less than 28 days (except in the case of *Haemonchus* outbreaks)
- Aim to keep drenching to a minimum
- Consider stock age/ class, condition, feeding levels, stress
- Combine drenching with appropriate grazing management
- Drenching should be a strategic decision and part of your overall parasite management plan
- Get advice from your veterinarian.

### One and two year old cattle (R1 and R2s)

The worm species *Ostertagia* is the dominant worm in the spring for cattle. An explosive outbreak of parasitism in cattle in the spring is characteristic of *Ostertagia* infections. Spring drench treatments can prevent *Ostertagia* outbreaks. Unfortunately the monitoring tools for helping make treatment decisions at this time of the year are limited.

Taking faecal egg counts for one and two year cattle in the spring is unlikely to help with drench decisions, as a high egg count would strongly indicate a need to drench, but a low egg count does not indicate there is no need to drench.

Another monitoring tool is to take a blood sample and measure pepsinogen enzyme levels. Pepsinogen rises when *Ostertagia* are active in the stomach. However, the problem with this test is the levels remain high for many weeks after the first rise, plus they are only elevated once *Ostertagia* have begun to damage the stomach. Therefore raised levels in a September test could be the remnant from a winter infection, adequately treated then. Also a low level in September does not exclude an inhibited population of *Ostertagia* being present.

Most yearling cattle will be challenged by *Ostertagia* in the spring. This is one of the few times when routine preventative treatment without using any monitoring information is valid.

For two year old cattle, susceptibility to *Ostertagia* is not clear. Some individual cattle may be highly susceptible, while most of the herd may not be. Past experiences must be taken into account and confining treatments to the lighter end of the two year old herd is a sensible approach.

The handbook “Sustainable Worm Management for Livestock Farmers” has more information and is freely available to all sheep and beef farmer levy payers. Ring free phone 0800 696 328.