

# Flock Life

Clynelish  
Climate Change Focus Farm

Notes from HiFEN meeting 3  
19th Feb 2015

This Highland Farm Efficiency Network (HiFEN) Focus Farm discussion group meeting considered the factors affecting productive flock life. Not unexpectedly this came down to teeth, feet, udders and poor maternal behaviour.

## Key points:

- Don't give un-productive gimmers a second go. Research has shown that barren gimmers are less likely to get back in lamb or if they do tend to produce fewer lambs during their flock life.
- Find a way of recording that works for you, but do record poor performers and be ruthless.
- Don't over pare feet - leave some hoof wall to bear weight.
- Try and keep the flank area dry and clean, rough stones can help knock off dirt pre foot bath. Avoid running out through any potential areas of re-infection.
- Foot rot bacteria will live in pasture for 7-10 days so move to clean area post treatment.

## EID in Practice

Guest speaker Roddy Scarborough from Cormalet Farm, Huntly has used EID as a management tool for many years working his flock single handed with all ewes having an EID bolus and readable black tags.

Issues are recorded by tag number in a notebook at lambing but equally could be recorded straight into the scanner. These are used to set up shedding lists through the hand held scanner to 'instruct' the automated shedding gate which animals to select out.

The bolus or eartag is read as it passes through the crate which has readers built into the sides. This was demonstrated by setting the shedding gate to sort a mixed group into ages which had been loaded up into the hand held device.



## Flock Longevity

Open discussion with SRUCs Dr Joanne Conington explored how long was too long to keep ewes, with most having a set age for departure at between 4 and 5 crop. Main points raised were:

- Trade off between prolificacy of the older ewe and her ability to rear her lambs.
- Older ewes do not feed their lambs as efficiently.

- Some had experience of older ewes having more udder issues which were not always obvious until lambing, when it caused problems.
- Some years seemed worse for the percentage of old ewes being broken mouthed, with grazing regimes, wintering and sires all being equal. What else could cause the variation between years?

# Lameness

A 10% lameness problem in 100 lowground ewes could be costing you more than you think. **Estimates suggest the average cost per sheep could be in the region of £16.00.** The subsequent impact of lameness could include:

- Fewer lambs born
- Fewer lambs reared
- Lower weaning weight
- Increased replacement rate
- Lighter fleece weights
- Extra labour
- Treatment (footbaths/antibiotics)
- Vaccination

## Bad Feet: Top Issues

Look out for Scald and Foot Rot

### Scald:

- Single bacteria found in sheep faeces causes inflammation of the skin between toes.
- Can be exacerbated by things like creeping thistle or stubbles causing irritation and bacteria gets in.
- Usually worst in lambs in a wet summer as constantly wet feet softens the skin.
- Can often step up to foot rot.
- Treatment: If a common problem footbath 2-3 weeks before it usually occurs as preventative measure.



### Foot Rot:

- Caused by two bacteria one of which causes Scald.
- Persists by chronic carrier, so be ruthless in eradication methods.
- Stinks. Causes under running of the sole and separation of the hoof wall.
- Most sheep don't produce an anti-body response so don't become immune.
- Severity varies; depends on bacteria type.
- Can be brought in with purchased sheep so quarantine and footbath.
- Ideal conditions are wet and warm and the bacteria can live on pasture for 7-10 days. Treat and move.
- Bacteria don't like high pH so liming areas around gateways, troughs and creep feeders can help.



# Treating Foot Rot

- Its really important that you don't over pare. Leave 2-3mm proud of the sole. Disinfect shears.
- Run through Zinc sulphate, Copper sulphate or Formalin footbaths (try and ensure feet are clear of mud prior to bathing).
- Use antibiotics if very lame.
- Can vaccinate with Footvax™ - use 2 x 1ml doses 4-6 weeks apart.
- Check again in 7 days and treat again if necessary.

## Foot rot avoidance – a 5 point plan

1. Quarantine sheep coming in for 28 days and footbath on arrival.
2. Consider vaccination prior to high risk periods such as housing.
3. Do not keep replacements of parents with lameness history.
4. Cull sheep which have been treated for foot rot twice.
5. Treat lameness quickly (within 3 days) to reduce chance of spreading.

# Other Causes of Lameness

## • Granuloma

Usually caused by foot damage (over paring!). Can look like a strawberry. Vet should treat it.

Painkillers and antibiotics if infected.

Bandaging with Copper sulphate paste can be helpful.

Cull if not responding. Will be isolated cases.

## • Shelley Hoof (White Line Disease)

Not caused by picking up stones; not infectious.

Hoof wall separates from the laminae (glue).

Nutritional (Calcium deficiency); can be inherited.

Trim lightly so long as there is good hoof underneath.

## • CODD (Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis)

Caused by bacteria plus a spirochete (a cork-screw shaped bacteria).

Causes separation of the hoof wall from the coronary band (adjoining leg). Not to be confused with foot rot which starts from underneath.

Don't pare. Needs antibiotic footbath, injection or spray. Re-assess and repeat in 7 days.

## • Abscess

Rare with good feet, can be caused by something working in under hoof wall.

Infection works its way up and can burst out the coronary band.

Should be isolated individuals again not whole flock.

Pare carefully to release pus and treat with antibiotics.

# Fank Design: Sheep Likes and Dislikes

## Likes:

- Following
- Moving uphill
- Moving towards light and other sheep
- Move better round slight bends
- Sure footing

## Dislikes:

- Shadows
- People
- Noise
- Smells



# Fank Design - What to Consider?

Facility	Points to note	Suggested space
Total Fank Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sheltered.</li> <li>Free draining.</li> <li>Near a water supply preferably.</li> <li>Close to a road.</li> <li>Central to gathering routines or sheep movements.</li> </ul>	Maximum sheep to handle in a day x 1.3 m <sup>2</sup>
Gathering Pen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Should be big enough to take all the sheep handled that day.</li> <li>Access through 3m gate in one or two corners.</li> </ul>	0.65 m <sup>2</sup> /ewe/lamb
Shedder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Solid sides with a clear gap at the bottom for drainage.</li> <li>Entrance should have forcing funnel at 30° angle of approach.</li> <li>Gate at the end should not be solid.</li> <li>Textured concrete surface.</li> </ul>	Ideal length 4.5-6m V shape: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Width 610mm top</li> <li>Width 305mm bottom</li> <li>Height 920mm</li> </ul> Parallel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Width 460mm</li> <li>Height 920mm</li> </ul> Shedding gates 900mm wide
Side Pens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum of 3 side pens.</li> <li>Hardcore surface.</li> </ul>	Total area = area of gathering pen Exit gates 2.4m
Drawing Passage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To connect side pens to treatment area or dipper.</li> <li>Textured concrete surface.</li> </ul>	Ideally same size as largest side pen to take whole batch at same time Width 1.8 – 2.4m
Working Pen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A circular pen to force sheep into dipper or race with centre pivot gate. Often worked with the forcing funnel.</li> <li>Solid and smooth sides preferably.</li> <li>Two revolving gates on centre post.</li> <li>Entry gate from drawing passage and exit gate to work areas.</li> <li>Textured concrete surface.</li> </ul>	0.35 m <sup>2</sup> /head  Radius - 1.5-2.6m  Wall height - 1.1m
Dosing Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non return gates at entrance and sparred gate at end to encourage flow.</li> <li>Textured concrete surface.</li> </ul>	Width: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One man - 760mm</li> <li>Two men - 1290mm</li> </ul> Height 920mm Length 7-10m
Footbath	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plastic tray incorporated into dosing race.</li> </ul>	Width - 360mm ground level Depth of bath - 150 – 200mm
Dipper		Capacity 2.25l (0.5 gal)/ head minimum
Drip Pens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximum sheep/pen 25-30.</li> <li>Shedding gate on entry from dipper.</li> <li>Ribbed concrete surface.</li> </ul>	Sloped to dipper 1:30 0.5m <sup>2</sup> / sheep

Keep up to date with activities at the focus farms at



[www.farmingforabetterclimate.org](http://www.farmingforabetterclimate.org)

These notes were prepared from the HiFEN Climate Change Focus Farm discussion group meeting held at Clynelish. Meetings are free to attend and all farmers are welcome. Contact farm facilitator Jenny McCallum on 01463 246084 or via [jenny.mccallum@sac.co.uk](mailto:jenny.mccallum@sac.co.uk) for more information.

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