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WELSH LAMB & BEEF PROMOTIONS LTD

NEWSLETTER

Farmers as Food Business Operators

Not every farmer realises it, but since 2006 they have been given the title of Food Business Operators, under the EU Food Hygiene Regulations.

Unfortunately, it is not just a case of a change in job title. Under these regulations, the authorities are obliged to introduce inspection regimes to ensure that Food Business Operators, be they farmers or food processors, conform to the requirements of the regulations.

In the beef and lamb sectors, Local Authority Trading Standards Officers have been appointed to undertake the work and will choose farms to visit on the basis of a set of risk assessments. However, it has been agreed that members of FAWL and other recognised farm assurance schemes are less likely to be targeted for a visit.

It is being proposed that on average, one in four non-assured farms will be randomly selected for a visit every year whereas just one in twenty five FAWL member can expect a call.

Chairman's Message

We have had nearly a year now of FAWL members in the Objective 1 areas being eligible to develop animal health planning with their vet. There has been an accelerating pick-up since the summer with some farmers ready for a second visit to review progress. Many farmers are reporting that they have benefited from the planning exercise with their vets and establishing a strategy for dealing with some problems that have existed on their farm. The project still has 18 months to run and I urge every farmer who is eligible, but who has not yet discussed animal health planning to contact his or her vet at the earliest opportunity. The benefits come not just in improved animal health but in improved management as well with improved fertility and better calving or lambing patterns for example being highlighted as areas that can secure better and more efficient production. WLBP very much regret that the funding cannot be used outside the Objective 1 areas of Wales, but we continue to actively seek other sources of funding that may be able to help. If you need further details please do not hesitate to contact the Project Manager – Iestyn Tudur Jones on 01970 636688.

Richard Howells, WLBP Chairman

Richard Howells, WLBP chairman, farms Gelli Farm, a beef and sheep hill and mountain farm at Cymmer near Port Talbot, with his family.

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Seminar success ...

During the autumn Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions (WLBP) held two seminars for the vets involved in the Animal Health Project throughout the Objective 1 region. Turnout was exceptionally high with all the vets attending believing that animal health planning should and will play a significant role in the future of sustainable agriculture in the future with the potential to highlight areas of improving animal health and production performance.

Guest speakers gave various talks with Arjen Brouwer who works for the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer for the Welsh Assembly Government giving the Assembly's view on future developments and its commitment to animal health planning, Robert Anderson a vet from Kelso in the Scotish Borders who's been involved in Animal Health Planning through the Land Management Contracts in Scotland discussed the benefits Scotish farmers are gaining through the consultation (see article on A view from the North) and also discussed why bull fertility in suckler herds was important. Agnes Winter from the University of Liverpool then gave a talk on the importance of correct diagnosis of lameness in sheep flocks and Bruce Lawson a retired vet from Dolgellau, highlighted various aspects of the WLBP animal health plan and how he believed that vets could approach the farmer consultation.

With the first year of the project having passed by, a trend can be seen in the most frequent occurring health problems/issues vets and farmers alike are highlighting. The following articles discuss some of the issues that are often prioritized by the vet in consultation with the farmer.

Remember if you farm in an Objective 1 region of Wales and have yet or would like to have your free animal health planning consultation with your vet, please contact him/her.

Participants at the vet seminars, from left, Robert Anderson (Merlin Vet Group Scotland), Iestyn Tudur-Jones (WLBP), Arjen Brouwer (OCVO Welsh Assembly), Moss Jones (WLBP), Agnes Winter (Liverpool University), Don Thomas (WLBP) and Bruce Lawson (retired vet from Dolgellau, North Wales)

Liver Flu

A major concern on all stock farms is the cost effective control of internal parasites which is a vital part in maintaining healthy and productive stock.

Here in Wales one of the wetter regions of the UK you should be aware of the high risks and severe effects of infestation with liver fluke.

Economically liver fluke is one of the most serious parasites affecting our sheep and cattle. It can have a major effect on the performance of farmstock. We know for example that affected adult stock have:

- reduced fertility
- reduced milk yield

with knock on effects in terms of

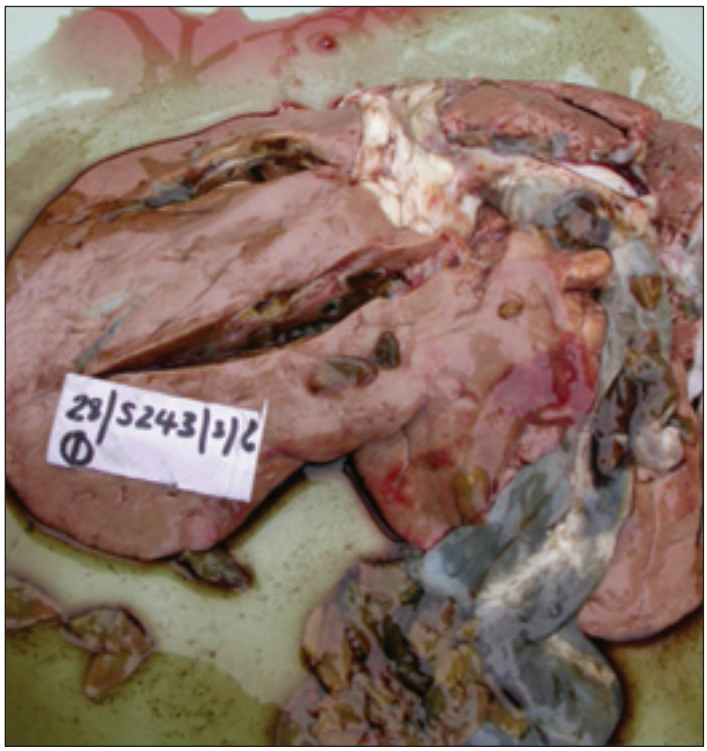
- reduced calf and lamb birthweight
- reduced weight gain in youngstock
- reduced feed conversion efficiency in youngstock.

Across the UK, data collected from abbatoirs in recent years has shown successive increases in liver condemnations due to liver fluke and this is probably only the tip of the iceberg as to the level of disease actually present. Certainly in our area (South Wales) we have come across liver fluke causing clinical disease on farms with no previous history of fluke infection.

Liver fluke (Fasciola.Hepatica) is a flat leaf like parasite found in the tissue and bile ducts of liver. Liver fluke is not host specific, it will infect cattle and sheep on the same farm and unlike gutworms, stock tend not to develop immunity to the parasite. This is particularly the case in sheep where adults are as much at risk as youngstock.

The life cycle of liver fluke is complicated but involves an intermediate host the mud snail, the pattern of fluke disease is therefore largely due to the effect of

ke – A Growing Threat



Fluke-affected liver (photo supplied by Carmarthen VLA). The picture shows many liver fluke that have emerged from the opened bile ducts resulting from cuts having been made across the damaged liver.

temperature and moisture on the life cycle of the snail. The risk of severe outbreaks of liver fluke increases following wet springs and summers. Regular fluke and parasite forecasts are issued through NADIS (National Animal Disease Information Service) to help you plan fluke and parasite control programs.

Acute fluke (autumn to mid winter) is caused by migration of large numbers of immature fluke all burrowing together through the liver at the same time causing severe damage. Cases occur about 1-3 weeks after infection in sheep and 1-5 weeks after infection in cattle. Acute infections can be so severe that either the disease or the treatment of affected stock can cause death or irreparable damage. Although the acute disease is rare in cattle, cases of acute fluke in sheep have risen significantly in recent years.

Chronic fluke (winter to early spring) is caused mainly by the feeding activity of adult fluke in the bile ducts. Cases occur 8 weeks after inspection in sheep and 10 weeks in cattle. Each adult fluke can remove up to 0.5ml of blood per day and can lay up to 50,000 eggs per day! Chronic fluke is the most common form of fluke disease we see and gives rise to symptoms such as anaemia, loss of condition and bottle jaw.

Remember even low numbers of fluke can cause subclinical disease. Subclinical fluke is particularly

"Resistance to flukicides has become increasingly apparent in Wales in recent years and a correct dosing regime is vital."

important in cattle as fluke numbers in the liver have to be quite high before clinical signs appear by which time losses in production will be significant.

Diagnosis of liver fluke is based on clinical signs, identification of fluke eggs on faeces and raised liver enzymes. Even if you have no clinical history of fluke infection on you farm then screening stock would be well advised given the importance of subclinical disease outlined above.

In Wales given the amount of wet ground, snail avoidance is rarely a practical option. We have to rely therefore on the use of flukicides given at strategic times of the year to control fluke on our farms.

As a vet in sheep and beef practice the provision of funding for stock health planning from Welsh Lamb & Beef Promotions has given us the ideal opportunity to sit down with our FAWL clients to plan their animal health strategies. All stock units should have a fluke control programme put in place with the help of their vet and this should include an effective quarantine strategy for any new bought in stock which may have been purchased from fluke infected farms.

Resistance to flukicides has become increasingly apparent in Wales in recent years and a correct dosing regime is vital. There are now a number of flukicides available on the market either single preparations or in combination with wormers. It is important that you use the correct product for your stock at the appropriate time and I would always advise clients to get independent help from their vet if in any doubt as what product to use.

Gareth Mulligan qualified from Bristol University 1994. He has worked in mixed practice since qualifying and for the last 11 years has been at Afon Veterinary Centre Neath. Gareth runs the farm animal side of the practice which is predominantly based on suckler cow & hill sheep family farm units.

SCAB – The Annual Problem

As the weather became colder in the autumn, reports were received of scab in our flocks. Unfortunately, this picture is quite common by now and it is quite a difficult problem to resolve. I am sure that many of you are aware of meetings that have been held in many areas during the winter to raise awareness of the situation. The Welsh Assembly Government through its Animal Health & Welfare Strategy have supported this process in order to try and reduce the problem.

Our hope is that there will be a way of using the animal health plans as well, not just to raise awareness of the situation but to receive constructive advise so that there is a chance of eliminating the scab from our flocks. According the vet Iwan Parry of Dolgellau "*an opportunity arises through the animal health plans to strengthen the relationship between the vet and his clients and gives time to discuss problems such as scab in particular*".

It is important to remember that there is a way of creating an appropriate strategy to get rid of this disease. We have succeeded in the past and even though things are a bit different now. For example an absence of statutory regulation, difference in the way in which the disease spreads within our flocks, we must attempt to get rid of scab once again from the country.

> "*The most important element within any strategy is to have the correct information as to what exactly causes the scab*" said Iwan Parry. "*And within this, quick quarantining is essential*".

Having discovered Psoroptes Ovis in the flock all sheep must be treated immediately following the licensed directions for that drug to the letter. According to the vet, it is also important to ensure that no sheep that could be diseased can join the flock that has been treated. In this respect, co-operation with neighbours is important and essential if anyone is to succeed in getting rid of scab. Iwan Parry added "*bio-security is a basic consideration to the strategy of getting rid of scab. It must be remembered that any new animal that comes onto the farm has the ability to bring disease to the flock and therefore it is important to treat them for scab as well as other diseases during the time that they may be in quarantine.*" It is clear that the animal health plan if used to its full potential can be a corner-stone to an appropriate strategy of getting rid of scab on flocks here in Wales.

Iwan Parry has been a large animal vet at Dolgellau, North Wales for 20 years and is a member on the Welsh Assembly's Animal Health and Welfare Strategy committee. He has recently been appointed to represent Wales on the newly formed Cattle Health and Welfare Council that covers the UK. He was appointed an Associate of the Royal Agricultural Societies for his work on fertility in suckler herds. Iwan has personal and practical experience of designing specific plans for groups of farmers to eradicate sheep scab. He also writes about organic farming matters relating to animal welfare. Iwan also regularly presents articles on the farming documentary programme, Ffermio, on S4C.

Photos supplied by kind permission of the Welsh Assembly.

REGISTER BY 15TH OF MAY

The new agricultural waste regulations affect whether or not you can burn, bury, store, use your waste on the farm or send it elsewhere.

The new agricultural waste regulations came into force on 15 May 2006. You now need to have stopped using your farm tip/dump. You should also now have stopped burning plastics and other materials that give rise to pollution and/or harm. Remember your Duty of Care when storing or passing your waste to someone else.

You have until 15 May 2007 to comply with the new rules and to register for any agricultural waste exemptions. Registering agricultural waste exemptions is *FREE* of charge and most only have to be registered once. For further details visit *www.environment-agency.gov.uk* or contact Environment Wales on 08708 506 506.

FARMERS VIEWPOINT

Richard Tudor farms at Glanystwyth in the Ystwyth Valley near Aberystwyth West Wales. Glanystwyth is a 500 acre improved enclosed lowland/upland farm which comprises of a flock of 1800 crossbred ewes, 200 ewe lambs and 80 store cattle. Richard has always had a good relationship with his vet, Ystwyth Vets, Aberystwyth and is an advocate of frequent dialogue and sharing of ideas between vets and farmers when it comes to discussing health and production issues.

Richard, through the health plan consultation has decided to prioritise 3 issues that he would like to improve on his unit, those being Footrot, Joint Ill in young lambs and Cryptosporidia.

"When I first heard of this review I thought it was just another level of pointless bureaucracy, but having committed myself to it I can now see many benefits.

The most important one is to demonstrate to our customers – the public – that we take animal health and welfare very seriously and by having the vets to advise us on our farm practices it can only be good for our image. It puts us one step ahead of our competition – including imports.

By discussing various farming subjects with your vet you also tap into his or her wealth of expertise and they may be able to advise you on any weaknesses in your daily routine. The vet in turn will also gain further knowledge of what works and doesn't work in your area, so it's a two-way benefit. I can only see this review as being positive to our industry."

Richard Tudor

Calf illness improved through health planning consultation

The WLBP health planning initiative has enabled us as veterinary surgeons to take a step back from the day to day routine and fire brigade work on farms and devote some time to analysing the problems which are most prevalent and most costly in terms of animal welfare and farm profitability.

The health planning visits we have performed thus far has confirmed calf illness as the major health problem afflicting most suckler beef and bucket reared dairy derived beef units. The major calf diseases involved are, not surprisingly, young calf diarrhoea, pneumonia and to lesser extent navel-derived infections (calf septicaemia, joint ill and navel abscesses).

In a short article such as this it is not possible to focus on particular problems, specific causes and control measures which should be tailor-made to each farm and detailed in the Health Plan. I will, however, take this opportunity to highlight some general management shortcomings which we have seen on a number of farms which if rectified should go some way towards reducing the number of calves that become ill.

Gwyn Jones has, since 1989, been a partner at Wern Veterinary Surgeons – a twelve vet practice with surgeries in Abergele, Bala, Denbigh and Ruthin. The practice concentrates on farm animal mediceine, with a keen interest in flock/herd preventative medicine, and advanced breeding technologies of cattle and sheep. The practice runs a small farm with crossbred beef and pedigree Swedish Red dairy cattle and a flock of 100 maedi visna accredited crossbred sheep to provide high health status teasers and embryo recipients. Gwyn became an embryo transfer team leader in 1995 and obtained the diploma in bovine reproduction from the University of Liverpool in 2001. His particular interests include Farm Animal preventative and production medicine, large animal surgery and Embryo Transfer of cattle and sheep.

Colostrum Management

Calves are born with very low levels of antibodies against even the commonest of bugs and virtually all their resistance for the first few weeks of life and a large part of their resistance for the first few months is provided by the first feed of Colostrum.

The ability of the calf's intestine to absorb antibodies falls very quickly from 100% at birth to 66% six hours old to 11% at 24 hours of age.

Ideally every calf should receive 3 litres of Colostrum within 2 hours of birth or at the very least within 6 hours. This can be achieved in the following ways:

- Restraining the newly calved cow and making sure that the calf sucks all four quarters completely.
- Milking the cow by hand and feeding the colostrum by stomach tube: this has the advantage that it can be done immediately after birth, when the cow is still restrained and before the calf has got to its feet.
- A common mistake, however, is to feed newborn calves with a stomach tube that was previously used to dose a scouring calf, thus transferring a good dose of rotavirus, cryptosporidia, E coli etc to the un-suspecting newcomer.
- Having colostrum ready, having previously been frozen in 3 litre portions and thawed out when a cow is close to calving. Some beef cows, particularly first calf heifers

will only have a litre or so of colostrum at calving and so this needs supplementing with another 2 litres of frozen thawed colostrum. Many dairy farms do have an excess of good quality colostrum – which can be frozen and is in our opinion much superior in antbody levels and cheaper than the powdered colostrum supplements. The transfer of colostrum between farms does however carry a significant risk of transferring diseases such as TB, Johnes disease, Salmonella, Neospora etc and the calf health benefits need to be weighed up against these risks, particularly in closed herds rearing their own replacements.

Calving facilities

Calves should be born into a clean dry environment and definitely not one that has previously housed a sick calf. We commonly see calving pens that, particularly on dairy farms are also used as hospital boxes for lame and sick cows. The feet of many lame cows are infected with A pyogenes or F necrophorum – both bugs which jump at the chance of infecting a nice fresh calf navel; sick cows could have Salmonella, Johnes disease, IBR etc all of which will infect calves.

The plan of an ideal calving box would make an article in itself but our health planning visits have highlighted the fact that very few farms have good dedicated calving boxes and one can't help thinking that a lot of calf health problems (together with some Johnes disease problems) could be sorted at a stroke on many spring calving herds by calving outside in May rather than inside in over-loaded calving boxes in March and April.

Mixing of Age groups

Another factor that we have seen on many farms is the mixing of calves of different ages, allowing the younger ones to pick up various gut and respiratory bugs from their older, more street-wise companions.

In an artificial rearing system this can be achieved by making sure that calves are reared in batches, with the shed being disinfected between each batch.

In a suckler system this is best achieved by having a tight calving pattern so that, ideally, all the calvings are compressd into a 10 week period. Achieving and maintaining a tight calving pattern, with the effects of nutrition, fertility and various infections on the suckler cow has been another area where forward health planning can make a rapid impact on farm profitability.

Gwyn L Jones
Milfeddygon y Wern
Ruthin

Healthy incentive

Pictured is Philip Jones of Gables Farm, Llandyrnog Denbigh where, following his consultation with his vet, his animal health plan identified the need to ensure that every calf obtains obtains 3 litres of colostrum usually within 2 hours but always within 6 hours of birth.

This, together with adopting routine disinfection between calf batches has reduced the incidence of calf scour from around 10% to less than 2%. Philip has also noticed an apparent knock-on beneficial effect of improved calf immunity on reducing older calf problems such as calf pneumonia.

Since adopting this rigid colostrum feeding regime Rotavirus vaccination has been stopped at Gables without any apparent problems. (Although Gwyn believes that the first calf heifers should still be vaccinated for Rotavirus).

Health Planning – a view fr

Health Planning on Scottish Farms took a major leap forward in 2005 when the Animal Health and Welfare Management Programme (AHWMP) became one of the menu options in the new Land Management Contracts. In effect farmers could choose subsidised health planning as an element of their Single Farm Payment. To date some 4,800 producers have chosen this option, approximately 23% of all IACS businesses in Scotland.

Review highlights progress

There are 2 main elements of the AHWMP in Scotland:

- A simple health plan drawn up with your own vet to include treatment regimes and a strategy for using vaccines and preventing disease.
- Collect performance and disease data, analyse and set up an action plan to measure performance and review progress.

Funding is pretty simple. Farmers claim the relevant cost when they can prove the plan is in place. The local vet charges a fee for drawing up the plan. Prices vary but are in the region of £100-150 for a fully compliant plan, and about 50% of that sum for the compulsory annual review. To date now our practice has 112 farmers involved, out of 360 farming clients.

Initial enthusiasm was lukewarm. The farmers felt pressurised by the Scottish Executive into health planning to secure subsidy. However as we are now in the process of annual reviews it is quite clear that those farms with a robust health plan in place have increased production, fewer disease outbreaks and much more effective use of vaccines and other preventative

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medicines such as wormers. In addition the establishment of an effective disease control scheme (biosecurity) for buying replacements will reduce outbreaks of disease such as sheep scab, severe footrot, resistant worms and BVD. The planning sessions bring to light many interesting disease and management issues:

- 700-ewe upland flock lambs 630 ewes in first 21 days, remainder over next 14 days. Sells first lambs in early July, but still have lambs to sell in February. Why? Could be wormer resistance and as part of his action plan we will investigate this in the summer.
- 120-cow beef herd, only have 15% of cows calved in first 3 weeks of calving. This leads to uneven calf weights, and on this farm severe pneumonia problems at housing. Likely cause is poor bull management, which is to be explored before mating.

Benchmarking

The above examples require only simple record keeping and analysis by the vet/farmer team to identify areas of concern and to do something about it.

I am in no doubt that Record Keeping and Benchmarking will be a key element in successful and profitable livestock production. Our Scottish Farmers have realised the benefits health planning can bring to their businesses and are now some way down the path of using their own vet as a health advisor who can bring significant improvement and profitability to their farms.

om the north

Veterinary surgeons committed to livestock vetting will be aware of the trend to larger farm units and the reduction in visits to carry out simple routine tasks. We have found that to stay involved we must embrace health planning and gear ourselves to be able to provide health and productivity management advice. It is no less satisfying but equally demanding of our expertise and allows us to remain at the heart of our livestock business.

The funding secured by Welsh Beef and Lamb Promotions is a major asset to allow vets and farmers to start effectively planning for the future of both their businesses. Our experiences in Scotland ably demonstrate the value and benefits of allowing farmers subsidised access to their vets to prepare and use health plans to highlight and analyse health and welfare issues on their own farms and propose solutions. I would urge farmers and vets to grasp this golden opportunity to move livestock farming and vetting forward in Wales.

Robert Anderson
Merlin Veterinary Group
Kelso

Robert Anderson has spent the last 20 years working in Kelso in the Scottish Borders. Almost exclusively with cattle, mainly beef and some sheep. Robert was once a small animal vet but liked farmer contact too much. His main interests are breeding bull management in suckler herds and the adoption of health plans. The Borders are very rural and rely heavily on agriculture and tourism for sustained economy. Robert's practice has 13 vets working out of 3 surgeries, each separated by about 18 miles.

New EU Transport Regulations

New regulations governing the welfare of animals being transported came into force on 5th January 2007. However, if you are transporting animals less than 65 km, or 40 miles, you are exempt from many of the requirements of these regulations. On the other hand, if you are to carry livestock over 65 kms then you need a Transport Authorisation. You may not think that you will need one but if you buy or sell breeding ewes for example, your favoured auction mart may be further than you think. If you haven't obtained a Transport Authorisation then you will need to do so as soon as possible. This involves a bit of form filling but you only need to do it once and the Authorisation lasts for a period of 5 years. Forms and further explanations can be obtained by phoning the State Veterinary Service at Worcester on 0845 603 8395. The Service has a Welsh speaker available if you wish to discuss the matter in Welsh.

The rules for transporting animals over 65 kms and over 8 hours are more onerous but are unlikely to affect many farmers. However, if you transport pedigree stock from say South West Wales to sales in Scotland and the journey could stretch over 8 hours, then you will need Long Journey Authorisation which does involve a vehicle inspection that will cost. You will need to contact the SVS in Worcester on the above phone number.

Finally, all farmers are covered by the requirement to ensure that animals are fit for transport, irrespective of the fact of whether they are being moved less than 65 km or more. Further details are available on 0845 603 8395, a DEFRA website or type 2005 Welfare Transport EU into a computer search engine such as Google.

12 months interval between two boosters

Vaccinations of cattle and sheep must follow the rules defined by the licence. Everybody can read these rules on the leaflet provided with the vaccines. The point is to ensure safe and efficient use of the drug. In not respecting the rules you are wasting money and leaving the flock/herd open to disease. So are you sure of your vaccination plan?

With regard to the flock most farmers already apply a first vaccination with two injections a month apart and an annual booster. However, we too often see a gap of over 12 months between the second injection of the ewe-lambs and the annual pre-lambing injection.

For example, a ewe-lamb vaccinated at 7 months of age in autumn, which will lamb as a two tooth, cannot wait for the annual pre-lambing booster which will be nearly a year and a half later. These ewe-lambs require an injection earlier. Perhaps the optimum time is in spring, after winter grazing.

The alternative is to start vaccinating them when you give the annual pre-lambing booster. In this case you lose a few months of protection.

The 12 months interval between two boosters rule must be applied to cattle as well.

Dr J.-P. Mocho MRCVS
Milfeddygfa'r Nant
Llanrwst

Jean-Philippe Mocho has been working for Milfeddygfa'r Nant in Llanrwst for a year as a large animal vet, which allowed him to become actively involved with the introduction of the Herd Health Plan in the area. Previously he gained his doctorate degree for research work on sheep production. To pursue his interests in sheep farming, he left the French Basque Country and its dairy ewes for North Wales. His experience in France includes working with pedigree cattle such as Blonde d'Aquitaine, Charollais, Limousin and Salers.

What's your diagnosis?

During the autumn seminars vets were asked to identify various lameness problems in sheep flocks and to give an action plan on how to improve different lameness scenarios on farms. Here are just some of the foot problems they were asked to diagnose. Test your knowledge. Answers below.

Reproduced by kind permission of Dr Agnes Winter, Head of Department of Veterinary Clinical Science, Liverpool University.

ANSWERS: 1 – shelly hoof (white line disease); 2 –scald; 3 – toe granuloma; 4 – CODD (contagious ovine digital dermatitis); 5 – footrot.