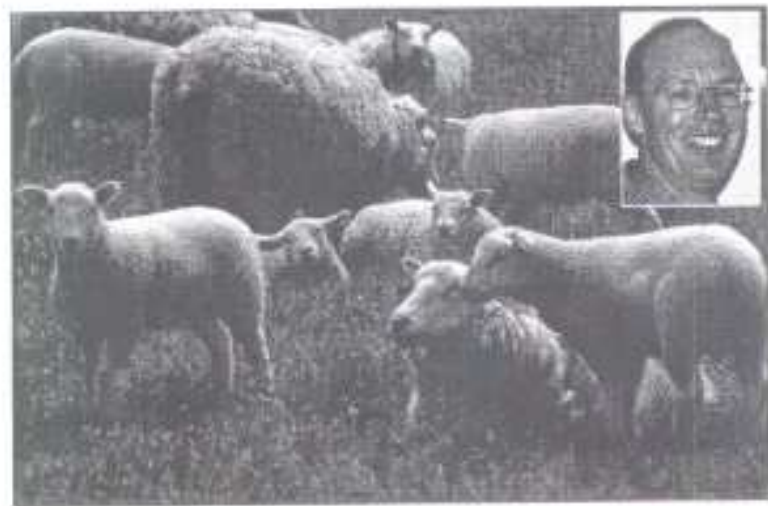


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By Marianne Curtis

# Using grazing to reduce reliance on wormers



*Understanding parasite life-cycles can reduce wormer use on organic and conventional farms, says Steven Turner (inset).*

**E**XCLUSIVE reliance on anthelmintics for the last two decades means many livestock producers have forgotten the basics of parasite control through grazing management.

Speaking at a Soil Association meeting on parasite control in organic systems, vet and organic producer Steven Turner explained how understanding parasite life-cycles was vital.

"Anthelmintics are the most abused group of drugs. Under-dosing and dosing at the wrong time occurs frequently, increasing the likelihood of resistance to these drugs.

"Lambs wormed every three weeks and left on the same pasture are suffering from constant damage to the gut. They are exposed to roundworms all the time, have developed no immunity and are re-infected soon after worming. This leads to reduced performance."

In sheep, dosing ewes at the correct time and building immunity through exposing lambs to low levels of parasites, then moving them at the optimum time, is preferable, suggested Mr Turner.

"Adult animals are usually

## PARASITE CONTROL

- Over-reliance on anthelmintics.
- Attention to clean grazing.
- Strategic drug use.

immune to worms, except for ewes in late pregnancy and early lactation when they produce vast numbers of eggs, forming the focus of infection for lambs. Ewes should be wormed at lambing to minimise the parasite burden."

Worming of ewes is permitted under Soil Association regulations and will be for the foreseeable future, according to Mr Turner. However, even when ewes are wormed, pas-

ture contamination will build up by mid June as temperatures rise.

Worm eggs can take 10-12 weeks to develop in early spring but by June this is reduced to two weeks. Rain/fall also increases the problem as moisture encourages infective larvae to crawl onto grass leaves where lambs can easily consume them, he said.

"Aim to move lambs to clean pasture by mid-June which removes them from infective larvae."

But there is no merit in moving lambs every three weeks, an old practice believed to help with parasite control, said Mr Turner. "This theory was based on the belief that parasites would die within three weeks if not taken up by the host, however, parasites have variable lifespans so it doesn't work."

Faecal egg counts provide the most reliable method of keeping a check on the severity of infection in lambs and cattle and can indicate whether they should be dosed. "Collect samples from lambs at weaning and hogs at 20-24 weeks old.

"When faecal egg counts are more than 1000/g move lambs to clean pasture and consider dosing. When they exceed 2000/g dose and move lambs. In cattle an egg count of 300-500/g can be significant and 1000/g indicates a problem."

Although the aim is to keep drug use to a minimum in organic systems, on farms with a husk problem cattle should always be vaccinated, said Mr Turner. "Unlike gut worms, lungworm is an unpredictable parasite. Vaccination is the best method of protection."

## Tipping balance towards resistance

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