

**NON-DAIRY LIVESTOCK**

# Internal Parasite Management In Sheep

By Ulf Kintzel

Internal parasites are often very poorly managed, may it be by wrong pasture management or by using wrong dewormers or de-worming at the wrong time. In fact, in my opinion internal parasites are the killer #1 in most flocks that I have seen. Internal parasites can become overwhelming and hard to manage in some years, especially when it is wet.

**BARBER POLE WORM**

The Barber Pole Worm (*Haemonchus contortus*) is in my opinion the single most dangerous worm that can kill sheep and lambs at a high rate. It is mainly but not exclusively a problem in the middle of the summer. This worm sits in the true stomach (the abomasums) by the hundreds and thousands and sucks lots of blood.

This leads to anemia, significant loss of weight, damage to the stomach and often to death in both adults and lambs.

Anemia and sometimes a bottle jaw (swelling under the lower jaw) are the clear symptoms of an infestation with barber pole worms. When you open up a sheep that died because of it, you are likely to find significant holes in the fourth or true stomach.

Rotate pastures. First step in controlling this and most other internal parasites is pasture management. Rotational grazing means a lot less parasite pressure than set stock grazing. Leaving residue of about 3 to 4 inches is one good practice but does not work quite as well for sheep as it does for cattle.

Due to the sheep's pointy mouth it is able to eat extremely selectively. That means that a flock of sheep can eat a patch of tasty forage, i.e. White Clover, down to the ground within hours and will leave other species of forage alone until the tastiest legumes or grasses are completely gone.

Leaving your own pasture for at least three weeks and grazing the sheep on some rented land helps to break the three-week cycle of the worms. If you have a neighboring farmer who can seed down some cereal rye in August at 3 bushels per acre you are likely to be able to graze the rye twice before winter. Harvested hayfields may be another option. If this is not possible you should attempt a rotational schedule of no less than three weeks on your own land.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

## Something Must Be Done!

By Jean Burr

More than once I have attended an agricultural meeting where small farmers voiced how hard it was to sell farm products to local people. These farmers are generally not reliant on their products as their main livelihoods, but are trying to grow and sell as a sideline. They complained that local people drive long distances to buy cheaper products in a big store rather than buy eggs from the neighbor. The benefits of locally grown produce and locally raised meats are either unknown to them, or not as important as price.

What raised my hackles was the reoccurring consensus that "Something must be done!"

I suppose this wouldn't bother me as much if these farmers were simply lamenting. What really irks me is that "something must be done" implies someone else should do it. No solutions were suggested, no positive strategies to improve education through farm tours or outreach to the local elementary school were provided. The very people who are best situated to address this problem apparently think someone else will do something, and they don't have to be involved.

Selecting for resistance. Selecting sheep that are more resistant to internal parasites is another great tool. This is done by eliminating those sheep that show clinical signs of worm infestation again after de-worming took place. One needs to be ruthless to do that since you will find that you will have to cull sheep that are otherwise very productive. Get rid of them anyway! It pays in the long run.

Dewormers. Selecting the right dewormer is also very important. The Barber Pole Worm is very often immune to all "white" dewormers (i.e. Safe-Guard, Panacure, Valbazen). Furthermore, it builds quickly resistance against Ivermectin/Ivomec. The reason for fast immunity to the very common dewormer Ivomec is the fact that, to simplify it, immune worms when mating with susceptible worms create immune worms.

On the other hand, Levasole or Levamisole (Prohibit) is still very effective because, simply said, an immune worm when mating with a susceptible worm creates again susceptible worms.

Another very effective but very expensive dewormer against Barber Pole Worm is Cydectin. It is fairly new on the US American market but has been used for years in European countries like Germany. Now there is some worm resistance against Cydectin as well. Since I expect the same resistance to develop over time here in the US I use it very rarely.

**TAPEWORM**

The second worm to be concerned about is the tapeworm. Adult sheep are immune to the tapeworm and those who aren't quite yet adult are not much bothered by it. But in lambs the tapeworm can cause significant loss of weight and at times also death.

The segments of an adult tapeworm are clearly visible in the manure. It is extremely easy to analyze whether or not lambs are infected. The tapeworm does not respond to any of the "clear" dewormers (Ivomec, Levamisole, Cydectin). The most price effective dewormer available that kills tapeworms is Valbazen.

Use dewormers only as needed. With few exceptions there should be no regular schedule for deworming. Anyone who still recommends deworming every six weeks is wrong. It should be mostly done on a need to do basis. I like to

But who better to inform and educate an ignorant public than the small farmer? These farmers have chosen to work the land, pasture the animals, and grow a quality product that they enjoy and want to share with others, for a price. To make the investment in animals or vegetable crops takes commitment, and knowledge of the benefits of locally grown products. Therefore, the small farmer is in a perfect position to provide information to the local community.

In some areas, farmers are already spearheading public outreach efforts. I know of two small farmers who hold open houses, and use that time to educate the interested public on their farm. One farm has been doing this for many years, and has quite a number of people coming and seeing many different animals and farming practices, along with educational explanations. The other farm has held two open houses, and takes visitors on a tour of the farm. Both farms started these open houses on their own, without prompting, because they saw a need.

The "something that must be done" is that the small farmer must look for his or her own solution, and not expect anyone else to



Author Ulf Kintzel de-worming his sheep in his self-made chute.

Photo by Ulf Kintzel

deworm my ewes with Cydectin or Prohibit at lambing in the spring. This way the worm pressure on the pasture is reduced when it matters the most and when the ewes are the least capable to build immunity.

I also like to deworm the ewes again in the late fall/early winter when the grass stops growing and it gets cold, or when I leave my farm and graze the sheep on neighbors' fields. This way I get my ewes "clean" and the chance that they get re-infected right away is very low. I put "clean" in quotation marks since there is no such thing as getting sheep actually parasite-free.

The lambs get dewormed for the first time when they are about six weeks old. That is when they need it the most. I use Levasole or, if tapeworms are present, a Levasole/Valbazen mixture. Usually, the ewes do not get dewormed at that time.

In a dry year I try to wait it out and don't do any further deworming until the fall. Or I just deworm the ones that seem to be infected. In a wet year the worm pressure may become so high that both ewes and lambs need to be treated again during the summer. Most often, I use Levasole.

Wait and watch. As long as you are capable of seeing the first signs of an infestation there is no need to take immediate action. I always wait a while. This way I kill two birds with one stone. There will be more adult worms to be killed and the immune systems of the sheep are more challenged and thus the sheep are more likely to build resistance. On the other hand, waiting too long will lead to losses or may affect the sheep's growth. It is a balancing act.

come to the rescue. Educate your neighbor, and be proactive. The time waiting for someone else to do something is opportunity lost.

*Jean Burr is a grazing specialist with the Soil and Water Conservation District in Onondaga County. She may be reached at 315-677-3851 or jbur@ocswcd.org.*

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