



MEDIA RELEASE

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Hidden drench resistance reduces productivity and erodes farmers' bottom line

While sheep farmers may not be able to physically see the effects of drench resistance in their stock, it may be slowly eating away at their productivity and seriously eroding their bottom line.

Feilding vet Trevor Cook says, on the vast majority of New Zealand sheep farms, there is no clinical evidence of drench resistance, even when it is present.

“This is because the production losses from not using a fully effective drench are often one of many causes of poor performance. Most drenches being used are giving a level of worm control that makes drench failure unnoticeable.

“Even though few farmers have done a Faecal Egg Count Reduction Test (FECRT), the majority are using combination drenches. The level of resistance to combination drenches is very low. It is only when a high worm burden is being treated with a badly failing drench that the presence of drench resistance is obvious.

“The overwhelming evidence of widespread drench resistance on farms comes from the results of FECRT's done over the last five or so years. It is only through these tests over time that it can be said that drench resistance is increasing. The time series of such tests over the last twenty years do clearly suggest that drench resistance is getting worse.”

Between 2004 and 2007, a study of 37 fine and medium wool sheep farms was conducted as part of the S³ Sheep Sustainability Strategy project. Faecal egg count reduction tests (FECRTs) showed that 45 per cent of the project farms were using ineffective drenches.

Drench resistance contributed to a loss in wool value at the time for the Mid Micron group of \$0.50c/head, and \$0.58c for Merino. The study predicted annual wool losses for the New Zealand mid micron and Merino sectors combined of more than \$2.2 million per year. However, this estimate did not take into account the cost of the effect of drench failure on liveweight gain and carcase value.

Drench testing specialists, FECPAK International, were key contributors to the S³ project. FECPAK managing Director, Greg Mirams, agrees that it is extremely difficult, even for animal health professionals, to detect and quantify the physical signs of drench failure. A diagnostic drench test is the only way to find out for sure.

“In my experience, there needs to be about a 60 per cent failure in drench effectiveness before you can see there is anything physically wrong with the animals,” he says.

“If animals aren't performing, continuing to use a drench that may be failing won't necessarily make a difference. You may think you are taking parasites out of the equation, but you could be

unknowingly leaving a percentage of the worms behind due to using an ineffective drench. You are essentially throwing money down the drain.

“Even a low level of sub-clinical parasitism coupled with an ineffective drench can pose a significant risk to the health of a farmer’s livestock and reduce animal performance.”

Pfizer Animal Health technical advisor and parasitologist Tom Watson encourages all sheep farmers to take a good, hard look at their drench effectiveness, as well as their broader worm management programme options, whether they believe they have a resistance problem or not.

“Sheep farmers have access to a wide range of drench options to help them control internal parasites. However, choosing a drench should be a strategic and well-informed decision, which responds to the unique needs of their stock and their farming system.

“Matching drench inputs to production pressures and the risks animals are under at certain times of the season, makes it essential to regularly review your drenching programme. This is particularly crucial when times are tight and spending needs to be made only in areas where the best returns can be gained.”

Temuka sheep and beef farmer, Donald McKenzie, says he manages resistance on his farm by employing sound ‘non-chemical’ worm management practices, as well as drenching. He also carries out regular drench efficacy tests.

“It makes sense to use drenches wisely and avoid using them before you need to,” he says. “Every time a farmer drenches his sheep, he takes one step closer to resistance. Even when you use a double or triple combination, you’re still going down that path, just at a slower rate.

“While we will never completely eliminate drench resistance, we can certainly slow the onset of it by using the right drenches in the smartest way possible.”

Help slow the emergence of resistance on your farm

- Use an effective drench
- Monitor and measure your drench efficacy
- Avoid drenching young stock onto clean pasture/low challenge grazing
- Avoid drenching more frequently than every 28 days
- Consider strategic drenching (drench to need) of stock
- Use an effective quarantine drench and protocol for your farm
- Introduce non-chemical activities such as pasture management and integrated grazing
- Consider refugia options

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