



MEDIA RELEASE

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Balancing worm management with farm productivity and profitability a challenge

Maintaining productivity and profitability while trying to effectively manage internal parasites can be a real balancing act for farmers.

“The challenge is farming profitably and maximising returns without jeopardising the ability to control internal parasitism in the future,” says Pfizer Animal Health technical advisor and parasitologist, Tom Watson.

“Internal parasite management can be costly, especially if the drench you’re using isn’t doing its job properly. Farmers risk losing money and compromising productivity by drenching without knowing its effectiveness.

“Regularly measuring drench efficacy is the only sure way to make informed decisions and determine the return on investment you are getting from your worm management programme.”

Choosing the right drench is important. However, Pfizer Animal Health encourages sheep farmers to take an integrated approach to managing internal parasites and address the problem from a number of angles.

Feilding vet, Trevor Cook says, improving return on investment from drenching hinges around grazing management, regularly monitoring drench effectiveness, and making better drench use decisions.

“Farmers’ drench spend varies depending on their stock mix, sale policy and their overall spring to winter management programme,” he says.

“While it would be almost impossible to calculate a return on investment from drench purchases, improving this return can mostly be done by putting in place better worm management programmes.

“There is a whole suite of actions that any one farmer can take to manage drench resistance. Many of these involve using drench in a way that supports the maintenance of refugia on the farm. This means deliberately leaving some animals untreated as a way of ensuring survival of drug-susceptible parasites.

“Using an effective combination drench has been proven to help slow the development of resistance. Drenching is only one part of an effective worm management programme,” says Tom Watson.

“Also minimising the use of persistent acting products, adjusting drench inputs to the grazing system, quarantine treating, exit drenching, and good drenching technique all help improve drench sustainability. Just which ones are most important on any one farm depends on the nature of that farm.”

The S³ Sheep Sustainability Strategy project carried out between 2004 and 2007 showed that, at the time, the Mid Micron group's drench spend ranged from \$0.30 to \$2.10 per stock unit. The Merino group spend ranged from \$0.20 to \$2.60 per stock unit.

"It's difficult to quantify the return on investment from drenching, because there are so many variables to consider," says Greg Mirams, managing director of FECPAK International, which contributed to the S³ project.

"Drench spend varies considerably from farm to farm. However, while some farmers in the study were spending three, four or even five times more than others on drench, it wasn't always reflected in their production.

"This could have been the result of drench failure and/or a combination of other ineffective worm management practices. Either way, it doesn't make sense to apply a 'hit and miss' strategy to worm management and risk spending precious dollars for little return."

A livestock farming operation can be affected by parasites in many ways. As a result, and in order to maximise return from drench investment, farmers need to understand and address a number of parasite management factors:

- Is my parasite strategy targeted correctly?
- Am I protected from importing a problem?
- Which drenches work on my property?
- What drench options will I have in the future?
- Am I selecting the right drench for the right reasons?
- Does my drench programme fit my market requirements?

Getting all these factors right is not always easy. Farmers should talk to their vet or animal health advisor to help them get answers to these important questions. Knowing the drench resistance status of your farm is critical and using products correctly can increase return on investment and increase productivity.

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