



Foot Rot Control

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Foot rot is a disease that has been around the sheep industry for decades. Foot rot is one of the most economically devastating diseases of sheep. Although death loss due to foot rot is low, losses in production, labor and treatment is very costly.

Diagnosis

Lameness is the most obvious symptom of foot rot. However, sheep with an early infection of foot rot may not be lame. The infection will move under the sole of the hoof through a cut or break in the hoof. The quickest way to detect a bad case of foot rot is smelling of the hoof, foot rot has a very easily detected foul odor.

There are several other diseases sometimes confused with foot rot, such as foot scald, founder, injuries, arthritis and others. The point to remember is that foot rot is the only disease with an easily detected foul odor.

Prevention

Where foot rot is concerned, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Producers should quickly realize this disease is much easier and less costly to prevent than to treat. There are several management practices to help a producer remain foot rot free.

1. Never buy sheep infected with foot rot.
2. Isolate new additions to the flock for a minimum of two weeks.
3. Avoid using corrals or other equipment that have been in contact with infected sheep within a two week period.
4. Insist that commercial vehicles are properly disinfected prior to transporting sheep.
5. Run all newly arrived sheep through a foot bath.

Remember, foot rot is a disease normally the feet of newly purchased sheep. Quarantine new sheep for a minimum of two weeks. Trim feet immediately upon arrival, treat feet following trimming, and re-examine prior to putting new sheep with your flock.

Treatment

Elimination of foot rot requires continuous dedication to a systematic treatment schedule. Examine all sheep for foot rot and move all infected sheep into a quarantine area. Trimming the feet of uninfected sheep is not necessary, but a good management practice. Run the uninfected sheep through a foot bath and move to a clean area.

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For infected sheep, trim the feet. It is important to remember exposure of diseased areas often results in some bleeding of the feet. This may be the most crucial part of foot rot control. If the diseased areas are not totally exposed, there is a good chance that the disease will progress. For effectiveness, the entire foot rot diseased area must be opened up for the foot bath treatments. After completing hoof trimming, direct application of topical medication should be sprayed on, then animals should then be foot bathed.

Treated animals should be moved to a dry area isolated from the rest of the flock. A dry area is very important. Research has shown the effectiveness of topical treatment is increased by 60 percent to 80 percent.

These infected sheep should then be rechecked every three days to five days, regardless of lameness. Opening up the foot rot will allow for quicker healing. Most veterinarians recommend running infected sheep through a foot bath at least twice per week. Quicker healing will result if sheep are moved through a foot bath each day. This can be accomplished by positioning the foot bath in an area that ewes will move through from food to water, or from the barn to pasture.

Once a ewe has healed she should be moved from the infected group to a third area for 14 days. This will allow re-checking before turning her in with the uninfected flock. Keep this procedure in force until foot rot is eradicated in the flock. There are a certain number of ewes that will be chronic carriers of foot rot (approximately three percent to five percent). Those ewes should be separated and considered for culling from the flock.

Foot Baths

There are several types of foot baths that will work. Fiberglass foot bath troughs are available that fit inside a working chute. These units are well constructed and durable, but can be somewhat expensive. Other producers have constructed their own foot baths using a 4 feet by 4 feet sheet of plywood and 2-inch by 6-inch boards forming the sides. The seams are then sealed with caulking. Putting a 2-inch to 3-inch layer of wool in the bottom of the foot bath will accomplish two goals. First, sheep tend to move through the padded bath better and secondly, the wool will tend to keep the solution from splashing out of the foot bath.

The best medication used by most sheep producers today is zinc sulfate. This solution is mixed with 8 pounds zinc

sulfate to 10 gallons of water. This solution can be left in the foot bath and added to or replaced as is necessary. Other compounds that can be used are copper sulfate (8 lbs to 10 gallons water) and formalin (1 gallon formaldehyde in 19 gallons of water). Zinc sulfate has some distinct advantages over the other medications. It is much less toxic than copper sulfate, and will not become progressively less concentrated in an open foot bath as will formalin. Zinc sulfate may be purchased through most vet supply stores.

A vaccine called Footvax is on the market for the prevention and control of foot rot. This product has been shown to be most effective when used in conjunction with other foot rot control measures, such as hoof trimming and foot bathing.

REMEMBER—ISOLATE, TRIM AND TREAT!!!

Foot rot is a serious problem for all sheep producers, especially during wet, muddy weather. Oklahoma is no exception, Foot rot should be treated quickly or a major outbreak WILL occur. For help in implementing a cooperative drive against foot rot in a particular area, contact a local veterinarian, state Extension veterinarian or county educator.

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