

# Welfare of sheep in the UK



The Sheep Veterinary Society recognises that there are some aspects of sheep management and production in which the welfare of sheep in the UK is compromised. The Society has particular concerns about sheep welfare in the near future during the period of transition from a subsidised industry to a market driven industry.

The Sheep Veterinary Society remains optimistic that progressive and competent sheep farmers in the UK will adopt management systems and breeding strategies that will meet the competitive pressures of a market driven industry.

All parts of the sheep industry, including veterinary surgeons, farmers, shepherds, hauliers, auctioneers and retailers, must play their part in ensuring high standards of sheep welfare during this transition to a market driven industry and beyond.

Sheep veterinary surgeons have skills and abilities and their involvement with sheep disease problems has economic benefits for the industry. Veterinary surgeons should ensure that their fees for specific procedures are reasonable and clear.

The Sheep Veterinary Society has concerns about the loss of local abattoirs and consequently transport to distant abattoirs. Supermarket groups can improve sheep welfare through their insistence on sourcing animals from farms that are members of reputable farm assurance schemes. These schemes have established standards for animal health and welfare. Livestock farming is a long-term business and UK farmers deserve stable and fair prices from supermarket groups in order to invest for the future. Unstable markets and low prices adversely affect animal welfare.

The Sheep Veterinary Society supports the British Veterinary Association's policy that slaughter should be as near to the point of production as possible.

The Sheep Veterinary Society supports the conclusions of the 2003 Farm Animal Welfare Council Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing, and recommends pre-slaughter stunning.

The Sheep Veterinary Society recognises a continuing decline in the number of experienced shepherds in the UK. All shepherds, whether incoming or experienced, as well as farmers and veterinary surgeons require increased opportunities for formal and informal training. The Sheep Veterinary Society has stopped short of recommending licensing of sheep farmers, acknowledging the associated complications and practical difficulties, but sees certification of competence as a practical compromise.

The Sheep Veterinary Society recognises that cases of neglect and unnecessary pain and distress occur. It welcomes the new animal welfare legislation in England and Wales and in Scotland that places a duty of care on owners and keepers of animals to ensure that their animals' needs are met.

The Sheep Veterinary Society notes the success of local co-ordinated sheep scab control programmes and the Scottish Sheep Scab Initiative and calls for a nationally co-ordinated campaign to control and eradicate sheep scab.

The Sheep Veterinary Society supports the Sustainable Control of Parasites of Sheep initiative.

The Sheep Veterinary Society notes that the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) is revisiting its recommendations on the castration and tail docking of lambs made in 1994. The current legislation dates from 1954. It is inappropriate and not based on scientific fact. Revision should be based on the result of fundamental and approved research conducted over the past 15 years. A change in the law is required to permit the combined castrator/rubber-ring method of castration. When these procedures are shown to be necessary, the use of methods that minimise pain to the lamb, or local anaesthetic is strongly recommended.

The Sheep Veterinary Society acknowledges the benefits of veterinary flock health plans, addressing anthelmintic resistance, lameness, nutrition, medicine usage and flock biosecurity. The SEERAD Animal Health & Welfare Programme option in the Land Management Contracts should be monitored as an example for other administrations to adopt.

The Sheep Veterinary Society considers sheep flocks deemed to be “under the care” of a veterinary practice, must have regular farm visits from the practice, the frequency of which will depend on the size and type of farm. Flocks classified as being “under the care” would receive veterinary medicines or prescriptions from the practice and be provided with 24-hour veterinary cover. All flocks “under the care” of the practice would receive at least one veterinary visit per year. Routine management and treatment of the flock would be discussed. The practice would only supply or prescribe medicines discussed and noted at this visit. In the event of a disease outbreak or incident not anticipated by the annual visit, then the flock may require a further visit for disease diagnosis and supply of medicines. Farms with more than one sheep enterprise such as breeding and selling slaughter and/or breeding stock may require two or more visits or consultations per year.