Strike out against blowfly strike

- Blowfly strike season is changing due to climate variations
- Industry report provides best practice advice for farmers
- Prevention is better than cure for blowfly strike

2013 was a challenging year for blowflies due to the delayed start to the season followed by the hot and humid weather. In addition, it is becoming widely accepted by farmers that the blowfly season is changing due to climate variations. The result is the start and end of the season is unpredictable. As the disease is a perennial problem, and the impact of flock health and welfare is considerable, it is important to understand the factors associated with blowfly strike and how to limit the risk ahead of the season.

Factors affecting strike

Anything which increases the amount of faeces that accumulates in the wool, such as an undocked tail, a longer fleece, parasitic worms and diarrhoea, will increase an animal’s chance of getting struck. The foul-smelling wound created by feeding maggots is also a powerful attractant for more egg-laying female blowflies.

As soon as temperatures rise above 9°C, blowfly larvae that have overwintered in the soil start to develop and eventually pupate, meaning the blowfly season is imminent. Although it is widely recognised that there are regional differences such as the season tending to start earlier in the South compared with the North, it is also important to consider that soil temperatures can alter considerably on farm too with south-facing fields often several degrees warmer than a shaded field and therefore more likely to see earlier cases of strike. Using a preventative product early, and ahead of the season, will limit the build-up of flies and the spread of disease, but also provide peace of mind that a flock is protected irrespective of localised weather conditions.

Industry recommendations for flock health

An industry report, ‘Protecting the Future of Your Flock: Blowfly strike in the spotlight’, commissioned by Novartis Animal Health, and spearheaded by a group of leading sheep flock health experts, identified that the key issues experienced by farmers include:

- Unpredictable weather patterns making the timing of blowfly treatment difficult;
- The increasing risk of treatment resistance;
- The problem of treating parasites too late in the season.

The experts advise that preventative action against blowfly strike must be considered in order to ensure an effective, year-round parasite control strategy for flocks.

Best practice advice for the blowfly season

The report goes on to provide three golden rules to ensure best practice advice when it comes to blowfly strike:

1) Prepare – arm yourself with the facts and put in place a parasite protection plan;
2) Predict – know the triggers that are most relevant to your flock;
3) Prevent – the key to good seasonal blowfly management is to plan ahead and act early.
Preventative solutions

Although the choice of product will depend on the individual farm, when it comes to good blowfly management, prevention is always recommended. Blowfly strike can be controlled by two main types of product:

1) Insect Growth Regulators (IGRs): IGRs break the fly lifecycle and prevent blowfly strike by stopping ‘fly waves’ from developing if used early in the season. IGRs with FleeceBind™ technology spread around the fleece and bind into the lanolin of the wool.

2) Insecticides: organophosphate (OP) dips and synthetic pyrethroid (SP) pour-ons. In the case of OP dips the user must be able to dispose of the waste dipwash and have the required Certificate of Competence. SPs only provide blowfly prevention where the product was applied with a fan spray. They do not spread around the fleece.

CLiK® and CLiKZiN® are the only IGRs on the market. They also contain FleeceBind™ technology which protect sheep by spreading and binding to the lanolin in the fleece providing full fleece protection*.

Integrating CLiK and CLiKZiN together is often advisable depending on the individual shepherd calendar:
- With 16 weeks cover, CLiK provides long-lasting protection while minimises labour requirements – suitable for ewes and lambs with any length fleece and can be used directly off shears, avoiding the need to re-gather sheep.
- With a short, 7-day meat withhold and 8 weeks cover, CLiKZiN provides greater flexibility when marketing lambs, avoiding the need to delay drawing stock off for market.

The key to good seasonal blowfly management is to plan ahead and act early.

For more information and to download a copy of ‘Protecting the Future of your Flock: Blowfly strike in the spotlight’, please visit www.farmanimalhealth.co.uk or telephone 01276 694402.

*Spreads to areas covered by fleece, other areas may not be protected, including the feet.