**How can the sheep industry achieve sustainable parasite control?**

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Gastrointestinal nematodes, liver fluke and ectoparasites are a major source of losses in sheep production, causing mortality and compromising health and performance. Historically, control has relied heavily on the use of effective parasiticides to suppress the negative impacts of these parasites. However, with this strategy came the inevitable development of resistance to these medicines, and the need for us to reexamine our approach to parasite control.

The number of reports of resistance on farms through the 1980’s and 90’s increased, but there was a dearth of potential solutions and mitigating actions to what was developing into a threat to the very existence of the UK sheep industry. It was in response to an urgent need for action that industry brought together the expertise needed to produce evidence-based guidelines, designed to slow the development of resistance, and in 2004 the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) group was born. The group’s remit was to develop sustainable, practical strategies for parasite control in sheep, which ensured the responsible use of parasiticides, in conjunction with other means of control.

SCOPS is a pan-industry group consisting of organisations and individuals with an active interest in the sustainable control of parasites. It includes industry bodies, UK levy bodies, sheep farmers, vets, animal health advisers, parasitologists, researchers and others. The group facilitates and oversees the delivery of these recommendations to the industry, advises on areas of research required and ensures that new research and developments areincorporated to refine and improve advice to the sheep industry. Over time, evidence to support those initial guidelines has been gathered and this has underlined both their importance and credibility.

SCOPS remains very proactive, highlighting upcoming problems and initiating action to mitigate new threats. For example, the group started work on the implications of resistance in sheep scab mites to endectocides in 2018, and has been key to the development of new approaches to scab control. More recently, we have broadened our ‘sustainable’ credentials to include more direct consideration of the environmental impacts of parasiticide use. Using our mantra of ‘use as little as possible but as much as necessary’ with regard to parasiticides, we are able to directly apply our principles to help reduce environmental exposure, while maintaining animal health and welfare.

The key to the success of SCOPS has been the wide buy-in and commitment to the SCOPS principles and approach across industry, and the group’s ability to build a reputation as not only a trusted source of information, but principles that must be taken into account when any new products or options are proposed. This approach has subsequently been adopted by the cattle industry (COWS) and, very recently, the equine sector (CANTER),