Getting rid of FOOTROT

It is possible to eradicate footrot from sheep and goat farms, but it takes time and commitment. Common strategies include hoof trimming and inspection, foot soaking, isolation, culling, antibiotic therapy, and vaccines. Once footrot has been eradicated, it is important to implement strict biosecurity protocols to keep it from coming back, as it usually walks onto the farm on 4 legs.

Hoof trimming

It was previously thought that aggressive hoof cleaning was necessary to get rid of footrot. This is no longer recommended. Outside of normal trimming to keep hooves healthy and free from excess growth, no additional trimming is needed for footrot. In fact, it is believed that aggressive hoof trimming can spread the disease and cause damage. Frequent inspection of hooves is more important than frequent trimming.

Foot soaking

Foot soaking is the traditional method of eradicating footrot. Zinc sulfate solutions are preferred to copper sulfate and formaldehyde. Foot baths work best with foot scald and the early stages of footrot. After foot bathing, animals need to be moved to a clean dry area. Infected animals should be separated from clean ones. Repetitive foot bathing is usually required to eradicate footrot.

Culling

Some sheep/goats are more susceptible to footrot. Those with reoccurring infection should be culled. Animals which fail to respond to treatment should be culled.

Antibiotics and vaccines

Antibiotics (Rx) and vaccines can speed up the eradication process but should not be used as standalone strategies. While penicillin and oxytetracycline are effective against the bacteria that causes footrot, nowadays, long-acting antibiotics are preferred for treatment of footrot. For example, research has shown Zactran® to be highly efficacious against sheep footrot. There are also vaccines for footrot, but they are difficult to obtain (in the US) and can be variable in their efficacy, due to the different strains of *D. nodosus*.

By Susan Schoenian, Sheep & Goat Specialist Emeritus, University of Maryland Extension. 2023.
For more information, go to https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/tactics-to-win-the-battle-against-foot-rot.