

# The impact of veterinarian-farmer engagement on sheep lameness: a clinical impressions study.

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## INTRODUCTION

The 'Five Point Plan' was developed by Food Animal Initiative farms in 2014 and adopted as the UK national strategy for tackling lameness in sheep.

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study was to:

- ▶ Encourage vets and farmers to engage with reducing lameness in UK sheep flocks.
- ▶ Increase implementation of the 'Five Point Plan'.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

- ▶ January-June 2020 - veterinary practices across the UK approached for interest in participation in a clinical impressions study.
- ▶ **Veterinary visit to each enrolled farm based on Five Point Plan:**
  - Veterinary assessment of lameness prevalence.
  - Establishment of antibiotic use using farm medicine and treatment records.
  - Identification of measures which could be taken to reduce lameness on an individual flock basis.
- ▶ Primary course of *Dichelobacter nodosus* vaccine (Footvax®, MSD Animal Health) provided for each animal in participating flocks.
- ▶ Veterinary follow-up visit 6-9 months later.
- ▶ Anonymised questionnaire to gain feedback on farmer perceptions of the impact of the study on lameness in their flocks.

Significant gains can be made in a short period of time with concentrated focus between vet and farmer on lameness in sheep flocks using Five Point Lameness Control Plan.



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## RESULTS

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Twenty seven veterinary practices recruited with 70 sheep farms enrolled.

Average flock size - 630 breeding ewes (range 60-2300).

In total 44,000 sheep vaccinated.

During the 6-9 months of the study, the average flock lameness decreased from 13% (range 3-40%) to 5% (range 1-15%).

Farmer feedback survey highlighted the positive impact of focused vet-farmer engagement around lameness control in the flock (**Table 1**).



Veterinary visits were conducted before and after implementation of the Five Point Plan.

**TABLE 1.** Highlights from the farmer survey.

Opinion statement selected in the survey	Percentage of farmers
Previously unaware of the Five Point Plan	33%
Considered there were difficulties in implementing parts of the Five Point Plan on their farm	54%
Found the project and subsequent veterinary engagement useful	97%
Will continue to implement the Five Point Plan	95%
Will continue to vaccinate their sheep against footrot	82%

## AUTHORS' AFFILIATION

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