Monitoring your animals for internal parasites using the “Five Point Check (5.✓)”

The “Five Point Check” is an important tool you can use to monitor animals for the presence of internal parasites. It provides an effective way to gauge the overall well-being of small ruminants. While not specifically developed for cattle, the principles hold true for them as well. It is recommended that animals be scored on a monthly basis with results recorded in the herd health book. Having the same person perform the check each month will provide consistent readings.

Combined, the five points will monitor anemia, body condition, diarrhea, nasal discharge, and edema – which represent the clinical signs normally seen in parasitized animals. With each point, there is a scale. Animals that have overall scores on the “good” side do not need to be dewormed. Conversely, animals with “bad” scores would most likely benefit from deworming, followed by close monitoring for several months. For animals that have mixed scores (some good, some bad), use your best judgement. If they are not as robust as other animals in the herd, it may be beneficial to deworm them.

5.✓ #1: FAMACHA Score

FAMACHA scoring tells us if parasites are causing anemia. Not every internal parasite causes anemia in the animal, but high levels of Haemonchus can lead to severe blood loss. Anemia can be detected by monitoring the color of the mucous membranes. For farm animals this can be easily accomplished by looking at the color of the conjunctiva (spongy tissue found on the inside of the lower eyelid).

Hold the FAMACHA scorecard next to the eye while gently pushing the lower lid down. Match the animal’s conjunctiva color to one of the five colors on the card. Red/pink is good. Pale pink/white is not good (anemia present). Animals with a mid-range pink may or may not need deworming, depending on their scores in the other four categories. Be cautious not to scrape the card against the eye, as a corneal scratch can be painful and problematic to the animal. Also, the colors on the card can fade – it is best to obtain a new card each year.
5. ✔ #2: Body Condition Score (BCS)

Body Condition Scoring (BCS) tell us if parasites are leading to weight loss (or failure to grow/gain). By palpating specific landmarks on the body, we can determine if an animal has sufficient fat supplies. To begin, restrain the animal in a way that will allow you to palpate five specific areas of the body: the backbone, ribs, hip bones, pin bones, and tailhead. Run your hands over the top of the animal, feeling for the backbone. You will be able to feel the bone, but there should be a nice covering of soft tissue on top. Next, palpate over the ribs. Again, the bone should be felt as you exert slight pressure. Moving to the rear of the animal, feel the hipbones and pinbones. Finally, palpate the tailhead, paying particular attention to the area between the pinbones and tail. There should be a small amount of room for the tail to lie flat against the body. Extremely thin animals have very prominent feeling bones, while it is difficult to feel the bones in extremely fat animals.

Most livestock are scored on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being emaciated and 5 being fat. Beef cattle and camelids (llamas/alpacas) use a 1-9 score. For specific BCS information regarding the types of animals you are raising, click on the links below. When using a 1-5 scale, an average score of 3 works well for most animals. Realistically, members of the herd should always fall between scores of 2 and 4. Extreme scores of 1 and 5 should be avoided, as they are associated with decreased production and health problems. Animals with scores of 1 and 2 are good candidates for deworming. An animal with a score of 3 should only be dewormed if other scores fall into the “bad” category.

Beef Cattle: http://www.cowbcs.info/photogallery.html
Goats: http://www.lurexext.edu/goats/research/bcs_factsheet.pdf
Sheep: http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/14303/ec1433.pdf

5. ✔ #3: Dag Score

Dag specifically refers to matted or manure covered wool. For the “Five Point Check” we expand the definition to include haired animals. The Dag Score helps to estimate the presence of abnormally soft feces and/or true diarrhea. While parasites can lead to changes in the fecal consistency, it is important to remember that many other diseases can result in diarrhea. If the animal has diarrhea and appears ill,
please consult your veterinarian! Using the adage “common things occur commonly”, we generally suspect that farm animals with abnormal feces may have heavy parasite loads. Therefore, Dag Scores of 4 and 5 warrant deworming.

5. ✔️ #4: Nasal Discharge

All farm animals should have a moist nose and there may be a small amount of clear discharge in one or both nostrils. Abnormal amounts of clear nasal discharge may indicate the presence of nasal bots. If the animal is observed stomping its feet, snorting, and/or rubbing its nose on the ground, we make the assumption that the clear nasal discharge is due to bots. Excessive nasal discharge, bloody or cloudy discharge should be investigated by your veterinarian.

5. ✔️ #5: Bottle Jaw

Bottle jaw is an accumulation of edema fluid under the jaw. It indicates low protein in the bloodstream. Again, many different diseases can lead to low protein (such as Johne’s Disease), but parasites are the most common cause. The presence of bottle jaw warrants deworming. If the edema does not resolve after deworming (within 2 weeks), please have a veterinarian examine the animal.

Performing the “Five Point Check” is a modern, proactive way to develop a strategic parasite management plan for your herd. By specifically targeting the animals that require deworming (based on clinical signs), we can reduce parasite levels without developing resistance to dewormers. For more information about detecting illness in animals and body condition scoring, please visit our YouTube website:

https://www.youtube.com/user/UAFExtension