



PRESS RELEASE

10 MAY 2023

WALES LAUNCHES FIRST NATIONWIDE TEST & TREAT PROJECT FOR SHEEP SCAB

Wales is leading the way in animal health with the launch today (*May 10th, 2023*) of Gwaredu Scab - a new project to combat sheep scab.

A Welsh national sheep scab eradication programme that is funded by Welsh Government and led by Coleg Sir Gâr, Gwaredu Scab is the first nationwide test and treat project of its kind. It is free of charge to sheep farmers across Wales.

Sheep scab is caused by a parasitic arthropod mite (*Psoroptes ovis*), and it is a disease which can cause significant welfare issues among flocks. Highly infectious and easily transmitted between sheep, clinical signs include itching, wool loss, skin lesions, weight loss and even death.

John Griffiths, Gwaredu Scab Programme Manager, said, “Gwaredu Scab aims to demonstrate the efficiency of mobile contract sheep dippers to safely treat large numbers of infested sheep. The longer scab stays on the farm, the higher the chance there is of it seeding to other sheep and holdings, so we would urge farmers who suspect they have a case to get in touch with our team.”

However, diagnosis is not possible on visual signs alone, as early cases can be mistaken for other skin parasites such as lice or maggots. Therefore, sheep scab is diagnosed by either skin scraping or antibody blood tests taken by a vet.

Dr Neil Paton, Gwaredu Scab Veterinary Technical Director, said, “Veterinary participation will be key in not only diagnosing scab accurately but in advising farmers on how to protect themselves from sheep scab in the future. By advising the farmers on accurate diagnosis and prevention the health and welfare of the national flock will be protected.”

Since the 1970s, cases of sheep scab have rapidly increased – mainly due to sheep imports and lack of proper quarantine - and the disease is now endemic in Wales. Data suggests Welsh flocks and those on the England/Wales border are heavily infested, with a general upward trend.

Welsh Government have committed £1.5 million each year, for a minimum of two years, to tackling sheep scab. Gwaredu Scab is a 100% funded programme offering a complete service from testing to treatment at no cost to farmers.

Treatment provided by the Gwaredu Scab project is by dipping sheep in an Organophosphate (OP) dip in a carefully controlled environment by a contract mobile dipper.

All the sheep in an infected flock will be treated, as a single untreated animal may restart the infection. Treatment will be within a designated period following a positive diagnosis, and once completed, the sheep will be protected from reinfection from scab for up to 60 days.

Dipping will only be carried out by fully qualified mobile contract dippers in full PPE to safeguard the health of dippers, farmers and the environment, Gwaredu Scab will be working with mobile dippers so they can obtain the highest qualification standards. Used dips will be disposed of by dippers at chemical treatment plants at no cost to the farmers.

As an animal welfare issue, farmers are legally bound to treat affected sheep once sheep scab is identified.

Participation in Gwaredu Scab is not compulsory, but farmers who suspect there may be cases of sheep scab in their flock are strongly encouraged to contact the Gwaredu Scab team to get their sheep tested.

Once a farm has reported its case, a Gwaredu Scab technical officer will visit to coordinate the testing process and, if required, approach surrounding farms to minimise the potential spread of the disease.

Rural Affairs Minister, Lesley Griffiths said: "Sheep Scab is one of the major disease risks for the sheep industry in Wales.

"I am pleased the Welsh Government is supporting this project to help the sheep industry, and sheep vets, to tackle and eliminate this serious disease.

"The work taking place will help protect the health and welfare of sheep in Wales and deliver significant economic benefits for the sector. This also provides an important opportunity for the industry to put in place the necessary measures to stop scab from spreading between flocks."

Ends.

NOTES TO EDITORS

PHOTO CAPTION:

The team from the newly launched Gwaredu Scab programme.

Pictured left to right are: Dewi Hughes (Animal Health Services Manager - Menter a Busnes), Angharad Thomas (Marketing and Communications Lead), Lesley Griffith (Gwaredu Scab Technical Officer), John Griffiths (Gwaredu Scab Programme Manager), and Neil Paton (Gwaredu Scab Veterinary Technical Director).

For more information about Gwaredu Scab, please contact:

gwareduscab@colegsirgar.ac.uk or phone 01554 748576.



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Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
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