

The Use of Organophosphates on Organic Farms for Scab Control in Sheep

Organic requirements are in addition to other statutory requirements
Statutory information is for guidance only and is correct at time of going to print

Until very recently the use of organophosphates (OPs) on organic farms in the UK was prohibited under the DEFRA 'Compendium of Organic Standards'.

Due to the recent removal of the market authorisation for synthetic pyrethroid (SP) based dips it became apparent that action needed to be taken to provide an alternative to SPs for those instances where the other treatments available were not appropriate, mainly due to the length of the withdrawal period.

The Advisory Committee on Organic Standards (ACOS), the body set up to advise DEFRA on organic issues, discussed the matter and with reluctance, due to the risk to human health, advised DEFRA to amend the regulation to allow the use of OP dips. Defra accepted this recommendation and has now allowed the use of OPs for organic farmers.

Therefore the OF&G Control Manual has been amended to state the following:

Animal treatment products involving the use of organophosphates are permitted for controlling ectoparasites only when, prior to their use, the operator has demonstrated to the satisfaction of the inspection body that a suitable alternative is not available and that other management techniques and inputs can be expected not to be effective.

Before any organophosphate based treatment is used a derogation must be approved by the Certification Office.

Recommendations

Scab can be introduced into your flock by one of the following means:

1. Carrier Sheep
 - Brought in sheep
 - Sheep returning from away grazing
 - Stray sheep
2. Shared handling facilities
3. Transport
4. From fences between yours and a neighbour's flock
5. Human contact

Preventing future cases of scab:

1. When bringing in replacement animals isolate in quarantine for the recommended period of time to establish whether or not they have a scab (or any other) infection
 - If they have scab (or any other infection) treat as appropriate
2. Maintain field boundaries and gates to ensure that neighbouring stock cannot stray or make direct contact with your own sheep
3. Check the scab history before purchasing any animals

The following conditions must be met before approval will be given to treat your sheep with an organophosphate for scab control:

1. You must send us a copy of Record Sheet 9 'Restricted Practice & Material Derogation Application Form'. This must be sent to the certification office requesting approval to use a specified organophosphate based dip. Record Sheet 9 can be found in Section 6 of the OF&G Control Manual.
2. You must send us a copy of a letter from your veterinary surgeon confirming the need to treat the sheep with an organophosphate based treatment. This must indicate why other, non-OP, treatments are not suitable and are not likely to be effective.
3. You will need to update your Health Plan and send us a copy of the updated section of the Health Plan dealing with scab control. This must detail the following:
 - How the scab outbreak arrived at your farm e.g. have you recently purchased any flock replacements or have your sheep come into contact with sheep from another holding?
 - What short-term measures are being undertaken to prevent the outbreak from spreading and to control/eradicate the problem e.g. use of OP dips?
 - You must detail all measures you are taking in the long term to prevent this occurring again e.g. the use of double fencing along boundaries where other sheep flocks may graze, checking the scab control history of any sheep before purchase, quarantine measures for any purchased stock.

Please be aware that some UK Certification Bodies, namely Soil Association Certification Ltd, are implementing a programme to ensure that no OP-dipped sheep or lambs are used by operators registered with them.

This means that some buyers will not be able to accept meat from animals that have been dipped in an organophosphate based treatment. This also means that SA Certification Ltd producers will not be able to buy store lambs and/or breeding stock that have been dipped in OPs. When selling your stock you may be asked to provide a declaration that your animals have not been treated with OPs.