PRACTICE ABSTRACT: #54



Sustainable PARasite Control in Grazing Ruminants

Ambassador Viewpoint: Plan, Monitor, Treat as needed

Experience from Bruce Thompson, an Irish dairy farmer and SPARC ambassador, shows how parasite control can become part of whole-farm management. Based at Camcloon Dairy Farm in Ballyfin, Co. Laois, Bruce manages approximately 270 dairy cows across 250 hectares, with a strong focus on animal health, biodiversity and environmentally responsible farming.

> ***"The challenge is to maintain healthy, productive animals while reducing unnecessary treatments and preserving anthelmintic efficacy for when it is truly needed."***

Parasite pressure changes between years and within grazing seasons, making a fixed treatment calendar inappropriate. Forward planning can help reduce exposure, for example by reserving lower-risk pastures for young or naïve animals and managing pasture contamination in advance. Treatment decisions can then combine animal performance, faecal egg counts, weight or milk data, clinical indicators and farm knowledge, rather than relying on a single diagnostic test or routine treatment date.

So, what does he do with this information?

One of Bruce's key contributions is his **Traffic Light Grazing system (PA#5)**, which categorises fields according to their estimated parasite risk using grazing history and previous field management.

By colour-coded mapping of fields according to risk, Bruce can prioritise lower-risk pastures for young cattle, which are particularly vulnerable to gastrointestinal worms. This straightforward approach helps reduce parasite exposure through grazing management rather than relying solely on routine worming.



Added benefits for the environment

Reducing unnecessary wormer use also helps protect dung beetles, an important focus of Bruce's biodiversity work. These insects break down dung, improve soil structure, support nutrient cycling and can help interrupt parasite lifecycles. By integrating grazing management, selective treatments and biodiversity conservation, Bruce demonstrates how animal health and environmental sustainability can complement each other while helping reduce treatment costs and the risk of anthelmintic resistance.

"Plan ahead. Where are the parasites? Do I really need to treat my animals? Consider the consequences."

Funded by the European Union

Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor REA can be held responsible for them.