

Search for Excellence in Livestock Production

Staying up-to-date on worm control during pandemic

Introduction

Gastro-intestinal parasites (worms) are the primary health problem affecting small ruminants in warm, moist climates. The need for education is continuous, as there is a constant influx of new producers, as well as existing producers who continue to struggle with the problem. The restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic made face-to-face programming impossible in 2020. As a result, educational needs were met with increased online education, including online FAMACHA© certification.

Educational objectives

- Continue to provide timely information about internal parasite control in small ruminants to new and existing producers.
- Provide an opportunity for small ruminant producers to get FAMACHA© certified during the pandemic.
- Be a continuous source of information on internal parasite control in small ruminants.

Program Activities

In April 2020, small ruminant specialists in Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, and Georgia initiated a weekly worm webinar series via Zoom. Each webinar covered a specific topic pertaining to internal parasite control. Each specialist gave two webinar presentations and served as the moderator for two webinars. An additional webinar was added in May. Chris Lawlor from International Animal Health (in Australia) gave a presentation on BioWorma®, the only commercial product to target worms on pasture (where most of them are). Webinars were promoted via social media, newsletters, email, web sites, listservs, and word-of-mouth.

FAMACHA© is a proven method for making deworming decisions in small ruminants. In order to get a FAMACHA© card, producers must take an approved training. Workshops are usually face-to-face. Due to social distancing requirements, online FAMACHA© certification was initiated in May 2020. Requirements for certification included watching a presentation (webinar) or video, passing a quiz (70%) and submitting a video demonstrating proper FAMACHA© scoring technique: COVER-PUSH-PULL-POP. Online FAMACHA© certification was promoted via social media, newsletters, email, web listservs, web sites, and word-of-mouth.

The purpose of the web site of the American Consortium for Small Ruminant Control (ACSRPC) is to provide up-to-date information about internal parasite control to small ruminant producers, educators, and veterinarians. The specialist has maintained the web site (www.wormx.info) since 2010. The web site is promoted via social and traditional media, newsletters, presentations, email, and word-of-mouth.

Teaching methods

Nine weekly worm webinars were hosted by the University of Maryland. Webinar presentations were 45-60 minutes in length, with additional time allotted for questions. All webinars were recorded, minimally-edited (with Movavi), and uploaded to YouTube. PowerPoint presentations were shared via SlideShare. Links to videos and PowerPoint presentations were shared by social media, newsletters, listservs, email, and web sites.

The webinar for online FAMACHA© certification was held via Zoom on May 8. The webinar lasted 2 hours and 15 minutes, with additional time allotted for questions. It was recorded, minimally-edited (with Movavi), and uploaded to YouTube. The PowerPoint presentation was shared via SlideShare. A multiple choice quiz was created in Qualtrics. Once the requirements for certification were met, participants received a “certificate of competence” (via email) and instructions for purchasing FAMACHA© cards. EventBrite was used to collect credit card payments. Checks were also accepted. Cards were mailed. Online FAMACHA© certification is on-going. Instructions for certification are available at <https://www.sheepandgoat.com/online-famacha-certification>.

During the pandemic, extra efforts were made to keep the WormX web site dynamic, so producers would keep coming back to find unbiased, research-based information on parasite control. Weekly blog posts were made in 2020. Eleven WORMinfo newsletters were published (via Smore) and shared via social media and a newsletter listserv. The video library was expanded. A page with links to podcasts was added. The fact sheet series, “Best Management Practices to Control Internal Parasites in Small Ruminants” was completed. There are 14 fact sheets in the series. They cover all aspects of internal parasite control. The specialist authored one fact sheet and served as editor for the entire series.

Results

Participation in the nine weekly worm webinars was 2471. So far, 6474 people have watched the YouTube videos. The PowerPoint slides have been viewed 6685 times.

#	Topic	Speaker	Webinar	YouTube	SlideShare
1	Periparturient egg rise	Schoenian	300	1124	1314
2	Fecal egg counting	O’Brien	194	722	1354
3	Barber pole worm	Matthews	201	644	1084
4	Grazing away parasites	Whitley	224	219	709
5	Coccidiosis	Matthews	206	1512	209
6	Deworming right	Schoenian	274	792	583
7	When deworming’s not enough	Whitley	120	222	428
8	Genetic selection	O’Brien	130	68	373
9	BioWorma®	Lawlor	153	1171	631
Totals			2471	6474	6685

There were 396 participants in the live FAMACHA© webinar. The YouTube video has 667 views. The PowerPoint slides have been viewed 597 times. So far, 365 quiz responses have been received via Qualtrics. The average test score was 89%. Ninety-eight videos demonstrating FAMACHA© scoring were received. Eight-four individuals were FAMACHA© certified. Eighty-three FAMACHA© cards were sold. Those that have not followed through with certification still benefited from the information in the webinar, video, slides, and quiz.

The WormX web site had 162,086 page views in 2020, with more than 65K new users. Monthly WORMinfo newsletters were viewed 5696 times. Fact sheets shared via Facebook (@MDSmallRuminant) usually had a reach of more 8,000.

Impact Statement

Weekly worm webinars provided timely information to a large number of small ruminant producers; online FAMACHA© certification resulted in 84 producers getting certified during the pandemic, while providing countless others with valuable information; and the WormX site provided information 24-7 to an increasing number of small ruminant producers, educators, and veterinarians worldwide.

Evaluation

According to follow-up surveys, 90% of webinar participants learned something new. Sixty to 100 percent planned to use information they gained in the webinars to better manage internal parasitism in their flocks/herds.

As a result of FAMACHA© training, more than 90% of participants use the FAMACHA© system to make deworming decisions. They have fewer parasite problems, deworm less frequently, spend less money on drugs (dewormers), and feel that their participation in FAMACHA© training makes a difference in their ability to control parasites. FAMACHA©-trained producers implement other “best management practices, such as pasture rest/rotation, combination treatments, and genetic selection.

According to Google Analytics, an increasing number of people are accessing the WormX web site. Page views increased 21% from 2019 to 2020. The audience is global, with users from 159 countries visiting the site in 2020. WormX is recognized as the go-to place for information pertaining to internal parasite control in small ruminants. It is frequently cited by educators and in media.