

# Newsletter

# August 2021

Summer is now well underway and so far weather has been favourable for most, long may that continue! This month we are introducing our new small ruminant resident who will replace Mike. Mike is moving into a PhD position within the university at the end of this month. Rachel is also heading off to New Zealand soon, but she has promised to come back in a year! We are sad to have them leave the team but wish them both well. Also this month we have a piece from one of our recent graduates, Lauren Westwater, who did a project looking at how welfare could be improved for sheep around shearing time. Finally, we have a new piece of kit that we are excited to announce.

## Alberto Luque Castro



I graduated from the Universitat Aut3noma de Barcelona in June 2019. After working for a short time in a Breeding and Biomedical research center in my hometown, Barcelona, I moved to Scotland and I started my career as a farm vet. Since then, I have been farm vetting in Aberdeenshire with mainly commercial and pedigree sheep and beef cattle clients as well as some dairy, goats, alpacas, pigs and chickens.

During this period, I have developed a strong interest in small ruminant health and management. In addition to clinical duties, I was heavily involved in flock and herd parasite

diagnosis and control. Moreover, I was doing Health Plans and I was responsible for the Flock Health Club. My main fields of interest are Flock performance and Parasitology.

In my free time I like to do some sports such as athletics or swimming. Despite enjoying outdoor activities, I love to stay at home watching series or cooking, especially during the Scottish winter.

I am delighted to start this new experience and be able to keep growing as a farm vet and as a person. I look forward to meeting you all soon.

## The Impact of Housing Prior to Shearing on the Welfare of Sheep when Shorn

The aim of this project was to interpret signs of distress shown by sheep whilst they are shorn to see if the shearing process affects their welfare, assessed by the number of cuts seen and stress score.

During the summer of 2019 a shearing team was followed and observed whilst both Cheviots and Scottish Blackfaces were shorn. All the 15 farmers agreed to take part anonymously whilst going about shearing like they usually do. The farmers were then split into groups depending on if they got housed off food for 6 or more hours. This is because shearers ask for 'empty sheep' which is defined as reducing gut contents to less than 25% of the normal fill. This is to allow the sheep to be manipulated into the positions required for shearing without causing too much abdominal pressure. Currently there are no set

recommendations given by British organisations, but they give a variety of suggested situations and so each shearer has a preferred time to quote to farmers.

Initially, the mobs were observed in 3 groups of 10 sheep – to get a random sample the first 10, middle 10 and last 10 sheep were used. They were then used to create a movement stress score, this means that if any of the 30 sheep showed one of the signs they got a tally. The stress factors used were leg banging, escaping shearing hold and aversion to going up the race. The average movement stress score was compared between indoor and outdoor sheep. The indoor movement stress score was 16.71, while the outdoor movement stress score was 23.63. Therefore, the movement score was reduced by 6.93 if they were housed.

The number of cuts recorded per mob was then taken as an average of cuts per number of sheep on that farm. To allow for a standard unit of measure the British Wool 2019 competition cut scoring system was used where 1 score was equal to 15mm diameter in size, or an equivalent accumulation of smaller errors. On average, 12.37% of the indoor sheep received a cut, in comparison to 21.88% of outdoor sheep getting a cut. This showed that cuts dropped by 9.51% if housed prior, ultimately showing that it is particularly important to not only the welfare aspect but to farmers' satisfaction of the job.

In conclusion, this study did highlight the importance of allowing sheep to empty prior to shearing in Scottish shearing systems. The figure of being in for > 6 hours did show a noticeable change in movement stress score and percentage of cuts witnessed. Meaning that farmer satisfaction and sheep welfare is improved if sheep are given time prior to shearing to reduce the fill of their gastrointestinal tract.

## New mobile cattle crush



We have recently purchased a new mobile cattle crush. This will replace our existing mobile bull crush. The new crush is designed for both bulls and cows and will facilitate foot trimming in a safer manner for both animals and personnel. In addition to foot trimming, it will be possible to carry out some surgeries in the crush too. We have a session of training in the use of the crush scheduled for mid-August and will then be able to get the crush out on calls after that. This new piece of equipment will be an excellent addition to the practice.

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