

## Is a Trace Element Deficiency affecting your flock?

Trace element deficiencies are common in the British flock, with specific levels varying by geographical area. While a deficiency can have an acute clinical presentation, it can also be subclinical, showing as a general ill thrift and poor performance as well as poor fertility, increased neonatal losses and increased susceptibility to parasites, with no specific signs of disease. A flock can have multiple or single deficiencies.

### Copper

Copper is vital in the function of enzymes needed for energy metabolism and the onset of oestrus, making it essential for a successful breeding season. Deficiency in ewes can lead to swayback in their lambs, whereby they have hind limb weakness and difficulty standing. Some farms may also experience lambs with anaemia, diarrhoea and poor fleece quality. Investigating deficiency is complicated but very important as sheep are susceptible to toxicity. Signs of toxicity include jaundice, haemorrhage and sudden death.



### Selenium and Vitamin E

Selenium and vitamin E are important antioxidants, used to prevent and repair cell damage. Most farmers will have heard of or had experience with selenium and vitamin E deficiency in the form of white muscle disease. This is usually seen in fast growing lambs. It is also linked with general ill thrift, impaired immune function and early embryonic loss/barren ewes.

### Iodine

Iodine is essential for stimulating metabolic rate. Deficiency can result in ill thrift and reduced fertility, as well as poor libido in rams. It has also been linked with late term abortions and stillborn or weak lambs. Often these lambs will have a goitre (enlarged thyroid glands).

Westpoint Group Trading Ltd

Dawes Farm, Bognor Road, Warnham, nr Horsham, West Sussex, RH12 3SH

Registered Address: Dawes Farm, Bognor Road, Warnham, RH12 3SH Company No: 08833557 VAT Number: 1818 536 85

## **Cobalt**

Cobalt is required by ruminants for the synthesis of vitamin B12 in the rumen. Deficiency is usually through low soil level and can be further complicated by parasitic gastroenteritis, whereby the diarrhoea interferes with absorption of vitamin B12. Weaned lambs are most commonly affected and clinical signs include ill thrift, reduced appetite, tear staining, poor quality fleece and lethargy. Severe cases can show neurological signs. Deficiency is less common in adults but has been implicated in reduced fertility and poor mothering.

Trace elements require a fine balance, and toxicity leading to death is possible. It is important to know the status of your flock and the levels in your feed before supplementing. Screening blood samples are the most common first step to assessing status so make sure to contact your Westpoint vet to discuss your particular case or for any advice on when would be best to test your flock.

At Westpoint Farm Vets we aim to provide the highest level of specialist farm veterinary service to keepers of food producing animals. To have a dedicated team of farm vets working in partnership with farmers offering our clients a range of benefits that will have a direct and positive impact on the profitability and efficiency of their farm, and the health and welfare of their animals. For more information please contact the practice today.

**Ashley Marshall BVetMed MRCVS**