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News Release

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LAMENESS IN SHEEP

The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) today launched its Opinion on lameness in sheep. The Opinion advises Government about the extent of lameness experienced by sheep in Great Britain and the impact on sheep welfare.

Professor Wathes, Chairman of FAWC, said “The purpose of the Opinion is to review the evidence for the welfare issues linked to sheep lameness and to consider appropriate means of prevention, control and treatment of the common types of lameness in sheep.”

He continued “Footrot, including digital dermatitis, is responsible for 90% of lameness in British sheep and is present in 97% of flocks. However, for most causes of foot lameness there are effective treatments that, if applied promptly, can reduce the prevalence in a flock to less than 2%. Shepherds must ensure that they are able to recognise the various causes of lameness and treat all lame sheep promptly.”

Professor Wathes concluded that “The Council recommends that the prevalence of lameness in flocks farmed in Great Britain should be reduced to 5% or less within 5 years as an interim target and to 2% or less, already achievable with best practice, within ten years.”

END

Notes for Editors

1. The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) is an independent advisory body established by Government in 1979 to keep under review the welfare of farm animals on agricultural land, at market, in transit and at the place of slaughter; and to advise Ministers in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, of any legislative or other changes that may be necessary.
2. Professor Christopher Wathes has been the Chairman of FAWC since January 2005. He is Professor of Animal Welfare at the Royal Veterinary College, University of London.
3. All FAWC members serve in a personal capacity and do not represent any organisation with which they may be associated.
4. Copies of FAWC publications are available from the FAWC Website or via the Secretariat at the address below. Approaches for interviews should also be routed through the Secretariat.
5. Following the Government's review of Arms Length Bodies (announced on 14 October) the Farm Animal Welfare Council will be reconstituted as an expert committee. Defra is aiming to complete the change of status for all its arms length bodies, including FAWC, by 31 March 2011.

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