Liver Fluke can seriously damage your livestock's health.
By Anthony O 'Connor, Teagasc Adviser

The risk of Liver Fluke infection is high at this time of year due to an accumulation of infection that has built up on pastures during the summer and early autumn. If you have a history on liver fluke on your farm NOW is the best time to treat all stock against all stages of the Liver Fluke before housing and the onset of winter. Although cattle can be dosed at housing. Treatment may need to be repeated in 6-8 weeks time depending on the veterinary product used. Dosing for fluke is essential for breeding ewes and for pregnant cows/heifers.

If cattle are out wintered, dose for fluke between October and December and then a second time at April/May to treat the infection they may have picked up over the winter/spring).

It's no fluke that this year there is a very high risk of Liver Fluke disease as the broken weather of the summer past was perfect for a population increase of the mud snail, the intermediate host in the life cycle of the fluke. This in turn has facilitated an increase in the production of the infective stage of the parasite.

Fluke damage:
For any farmer who has seen flukes wiggle from the condemned livers of slaughtered animals at meat factories or abattoirs, it's a sight to turn your stomach. However damaged livers are just the tip of the iceberg. Other problems caused by liver fluke include:

- Depending on the level of infection, liver fluke may cause lack of thrive, poor appetite, a reduced weight gain of up to 20% in cattle and up to 30% in sheep.
- A reduction in milk production (up to 8% in both suckler and dairy cows.
- Fertility status can suffer in breeding stock.
- Up to 50% of infected livers can be condemned at meat plants.
- Severe infection may cause death due to anaemia.
- Sudden death by triggering certain clostridia diseases.

Fluke Treatment:
Some suggestions when treating for fluke are as follows:

- Consult your vet about most appropriate treatment plan/veterinary product to use on your herd/flock.
- All bought in stock should be treated for all stages of fluke and kept separate from the rest of the stock for at least 4 weeks.
• Before you start dosing for fluke, check the product label to see what fluke stages it kills and the flukicide withdrawal period.
• Most of the fluke only injections/drenches which have a wider spectrum of activity against the different fluke stages have at least a fifty day withdrawal period for meat/offal in cattle and 18 days plus in sheep.
• Only treat dairy cows when they are dried off, paying particular attention to the restricted number of products available in dairy animals and the withdrawal period for milk supply.
• Combination products, which kill fluke, worms and other parasites, are available in the form of pour-ons etc. However, some of these products will not kill all stages of the fluke.
• There is evidence for triclabendazole resistant strains of liver fluke in Ireland. Changing flukicide type every few years may prevent the build-up of resistance on farms.
• Faecal samples to (determine presence/absence of fluke eggs) and feedback from the factories on liver condition of your animals will provide information on liver fluke status of your herd/flock
• Faecal samples, taken approximately 8 weeks post the housing treatment will give some indication of the efficacy of the flukicide used.
• Dispose of empty flukicide containers responsibly at Local Authority dump or at designated collection point during Hazardous Waste Collection day.