



ARMAC Veterinary Group

In conjunction with
Westgate laboratories

Why we need to change to targeted worming.

In recent years we have all become familiar with the idea of a rotational worming programme where different wormers are used at certain times of year to treat particular parasites. Normal practice was to change the main drug used each year, but in order to cover all possibilities you would still need to use particular products for treating tapeworms and encysted redworm. This can get very complicated indeed!

Resistance to wormers.

The main problem with such comprehensive programmes is that the worms are getting clever and evolving to become resistant to some worming drugs, especially those that have been around for a long time. This means that you can no longer rely on keeping your horse worm free purely by giving him wormers. Not only that, the overuse of the currently effective products on the market can only lead to more resistance problems in the future, a very worrying prospect for all horse owners. There are no new wormers coming along so it is vitally important that the very good products we have available are kept effective by only giving them to the horses who need them. We need to find out which horses need worming, and we can easily do that by using tests to form the core of the worming programme.

Using worm counts.

Basing your worming on faecal egg counts, or worm counts as they are known, can work really well and prove cost effective too. If you keep one or two horses at home and have full control over their welfare it is really easy to do this and with a little organisation it can work well in other situations too. All that is really needed is for one person to take control and, if you are on a yard, to make sure everyone joins in.

Why should I use worm counts in my worming programme?

If you are using a full programme you can make sure it is effective. In many cases you will be able to replace some wormer doses with counts, cutting down on the amount of chemicals going into your horse and out onto the pasture. You can target the correct wormers at the horse who needs them instead of wasting doses on 'clean' horses.

I've heard that worm counts don't show all the worms though?

That is quite correct. Nevertheless a worm count is still a very useful tool. Encysted stages of redworm are not mature so don't lay the eggs that are counted in the dung sample. It is important to treat with an effective product in the winter months then you can rely on your worm count results over the next season. Tapeworm eggs often appear in dung samples but you still need to cover tapeworms in your plan as the test is not definitive. Alternately ask your vet for an 'elisa' blood test.

I'm reluctant to give up regular worming, I'd rather be safe than sorry.

Following a complicated and expensive worming programme does not guarantee that your horse will be free of parasites. Westgate Labs test many horses that have been on worming programmes and still have medium or high worm count results. Growing resistance to some worming drugs means that they may not be effective for your horse. This can only get worse in years to come and there are no new worming drugs. Regular worm counts can identify parasite problems, sometimes only affecting one horse in a herd, so they can be correctly treated.

Isn't it expensive?

This is an important question. The main aim of using a worm count programme is to have a healthier horse with a well-managed worming regime but one of the side benefits is that it is usually a less expensive option. Most people save money on worming by using a targeted programme, sometimes they save a lot. When you first start there may be a period when you need to both count and give a wormer for instance when a horse proves to have a parasite problem. Using tests means that the problem is recognised and being dealt with. We will look in more detail at this question.

Thinking about costs.

Using worm counts in your programme leads to better worming for your horse and that remains the most important reason for doing so. You will also be slowing down the development of resistance to wormers. However we know that some people are worried about the costs involved so we thought it useful to take a look at those. The vast majority of clients will save money on their worming costs by introducing a worm count programme

Current Worming Programme

Single 500kg horse on the present worming programme

January	- Equest	11-68
April	- Equest Pramox	18-29
July	- Equest	11-68
October	- Equest Pramox	18-29

Total for year £59-94

Targeted Worming Programme

Single 500kg horse kept in a low risk situation.

January	- Equest	11-68
April	- Worm Count	9-00
July	- Worm Count	9-00
October	- Worm Count	9-00
	- Equitape	9-36

Total for year £48-04
Includes postage for samples

These figures are just to give you an idea of how reduced programmes can work and may vary according to individual needs and services used.

How to send samples

Choose a day to collect samples when worming is due or overdue for most of the horses. This is important so that you don't get a false result caused by wormer still working in your horse. The dung should be as fresh as possible but can still be posted the day after collection.

1. Use the glove to pick up a small piece of fresh dung.
2. The sample should fill the container.
3. Label the sample with the horse's name and number it if you are sending more than one sample in the envelope. Please write in ballpoint pen as water based inks may wash off.
4. Put the sample in the plastic bag. Do not put any paperwork inside the plastic bag.
5. Put the sample and paperwork inside the padded bag
6. Please pack the contents of the padded bag as flat as possible to that the bag travels as a 'large letter' rather than a packet. Postage is pre-paid – maximum 5 samples per bag.