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Assessment of farmer recognition and reporting of lameness in adults in 35 lowland sheep flocks in England

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to assess the accuracy of farmer recognition and reporting of lameness in their sheep flock when compared with the prevalence of lameness observed by a researcher. Thirty-five sheep farms were visited. Farmers were asked for estimates of the prevalence of lameness in 2008, in the flock and in one group of sheep that was inspected by the researcher the same day. These estimates were then compared with the researcher's estimate of lameness. All farmers were able to recognise lame sheep but they slightly under reported the prevalence of lameness in the group selected for examination when compared with the researcher's estimate. The proportion underestimated increased as the prevalence of lameness in the group increased. Farmer estimates on the day were consistently, closely and significantly correlated to that of the researcher's estimate of prevalence of lameness. We conclude that farmer estimates of prevalence of lameness in sheep are a sufficiently accurate and reliable tool for risk factor studies. The prevalence of lameness in sheep, nationally, is probably higher than the current estimate of 10% by 2–3%.

Keywords: *animal welfare, farmer reliability, lameness, recognition, reporting, sheep*