

Managing Orf with TCIM (Traditional, Complementary and Integrative Medicine)*

– A Sheep Farmer's Case Study

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*As defined by the World Health Organisation

Summary

This Study shows that, when using TCIM, farmers can stop the spread of Orf and minimise the long-term impacts on flock health, while reducing reliance on costly conventional medicines (antibiotics and vaccinations).



Disease: Orf (Contagious Ecthyma) - a contagious skin disease affecting ruminants, specifically sheep and goats.

Treatment: Homeopathic Remedies (TCIM): Borax & Nitric Acid for lesions, and the Orf Nosode (TCIM) for disease prevention.

Results: Rapid resolution of symptoms, outbreaks resolved within five days (vs. six weeks typical duration), no significant disruptions to lamb growth, and no financial impact.

Cost savings: Avoided £468 annual vaccination cost, based on 100 ewes and 160 lambs.

Long-Term Impact: To date, no outbreak since 2018*. *current year is 2025

Context

Orf or Ecthyma is a pathogenic disease, known to infect sheep and goats. In England an estimated 2% of ewes and 20% of lambs become infected annually. People are known to contract Orf through open wounds, and human cases have shown serious bacterial infection.

Clinical symptoms of Orf in lambs include the development of painful blisters or skin lesions around the mouth, tongue, gums, and nose, which can spread quickly through contact to the teats of ewes. Untreated lesions can spread, making feeding painful for both lambs and ewes. This impacts lamb growth rates, compromises animal welfare, and ultimately leads to financial losses for the farm business.

Conventionally, antibiotics can be used to treat the infection and long-term a vaccination is recommended as a preventative measure but can be difficult to administer and is costly at £180 per 100 doses*.

(*Current year is 2025)



Case Study

A Soil Association Certified Organic Farm in Coastal East Devon faced recurrent outbreaks of Orf over a 4-year period. A study was conducted in 2018 using Homeopathic remedies Borax and Nitric Acid to treat skins lesions, paired with the Orf Nosode for prevention.

The remedies and nosode were applied in water using a spray directly onto the muzzles of all ewes and lambs, regardless of whether they showed signs of Orf. The flock was checked daily to monitor progress.



Farmer Observations

Effectiveness of Homeopathic Remedies

The outbreak lasted less than five days, minimising disruption to lamb feeding and growth rates. The remedies and Nosode have consistently stopped the spread of Orf since 2018. Overall, the approach has prevented long-term impacts on flock health and financial losses to the business.

Financial Considerations

Vaccination against Orf typically costs the farmer £180 per 100 doses. The remedies and Orf Nosode offer a cost-effective alternative that is quick and easy to administer.

Proactive Health Management

Administering the Orf Nosode pre-emptively before returning animals to previously infected fields is a key strategy. This approach has resulted in the flock remaining Orf free*. Recording grazing patterns and the timing of any Orf outbreaks, is crucial for planning preventative measures.

Readiness and Practicality

Keeping the Orf Nosode and Homeopathic remedies, Borax and Nitric Acid readily available ensures preparedness.

Farmer Comments

"I was amazed; the spread of Orf was stopped in its tracks as soon as I used the Nosode."

"Using the Orf Nosode means I am safe in the knowledge that my flock are protected, without the challenges of administering a vaccine and the complications that can come with that."

Resources

Please visit Whole Health Agriculture for a full breakdown of our learning centre resources and membership benefits learning.wholehealthag.org

DISCLAIMER: This case is based on one farmer's experience. There are other remedies that may be considered for the management of Orf. There was no conflict of interest with regard to this study; the farmer received no sponsorship or commission.

Nic Westlake



Nic has a Soil Association certified beef and sheep farm on the South Devon coast on National Trust land. The cattle are Aberdeen Angus x Hereford and ewes are Lleyn put to either a Lleyn or Hampshire ram. She supplies 100% grass fed meat to supermarkets and a local food hub

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