

# Reducing lead contamination in your livestock

## Lead contamination: a serious issue

In addition to vehicle batteries, bonfire ash, piping, flashing, flaky lead paint and putty, livestock can also be exposed to lead from the soil itself which is sometimes referred to as geochemical lead. You may already be aware of a Food standards Agency guidance leaflet 'Help Stop On-Farm Lead Poisoning'

(<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdfs/publication/leadpoison0209.pdf>)

Maximum levels of lead in food, that includes meat and offal, are established in food safety legislation. Farmers can take steps to help protect the human food chain. As a livestock farmer this means that you should ensure where possible that your animals are not being unnecessarily exposed to lead.

Lead is not significantly taken up by plants; it is contaminated soil that is the biggest issue when it is ingested either during grazing or in soil contaminated forage. Steps can be taken to reduce lead contamination in conserved forage, other feed crops and direct soil ingestion.

## Reducing lead exposure:

The first step is to identify areas of high geochemical lead; review the farm plan and take account of local knowledge to determine where the highest levels of contamination might be – contamination is typically localised and whole field analysis is not sufficient.



## Highly contaminated areas should not be used for grazing.



'I pride myself in producing the best quality beef and lamb and will take every step necessary to ensure that they are safe for the consumer' Joe Dalton, Peak District.

Moderately contaminated areas should be managed to minimise the animal's soil consumption:

Grazing:

- Where possible, fence off areas of exposed soil.
- Ensure fields have good sward cover and height – permanent pasture is better than reseeded pasture and short term leys, as it is denser.
- Over-grazing and areas of bare soil increases soil contamination in wet conditions and leads to contaminated dusts in dry conditions.
- Avoid land becoming poached.
- When finishing stock for slaughter avoid grazing fields that flood in regions known to be down stream of high lead soils.

Feed:

- Feed supplementary food from troughs or raised feeders.
- Encourage stock to use water troughs with mains water or tested borehole water as opposed to natural pools which will contain run-off water.
- Ensure that cattle have a balanced diet including minerals to avoid pica – the provision of salt licks may reduce soil ingestion.
- Avoid feeding root crops that are very heavily contaminated with soil.

Silage-making:

- Make sure that mowers are set high to avoid contact with soil.

Reducing residues:

If known to be grazing on land with high geo chemical lead try to introduce a minimum withdrawal period of 16 weeks before slaughter to allow the excretion of excess lead; do not fatten stock directly on contaminated pastures:

- Sell livestock as stores.
- Move livestock to finish on uncontaminated pasture.
- House livestock to finish on an uncontaminated diet.
- If selling stock that are close to finishing or direct to slaughter, then food chain information must be provided so offal can be discarded at slaughter.