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## Workshop on the replacement of anthelmintics in organic livestock farming

### RELACS partners ‘Soil Association’ and ‘Scotland’s Rural College’ (SRUC) at Oxford Real Farming Conference

The “[Worm Control Without Anthelmintics](#)” workshop, part of the [Oxford Real Farm Conference](#), took place on Sunday, 10 January 2021. The event, which was organised and chaired by [Soil Association](#)’s Ana Allamand, took place via Zoom, bringing together over 150 participants from across the world.

Its primary focus was to discuss the “Replacement of Anthelmintics in Organic Livestock”, [one of the key objectives of the RELACS project](#). It offered the opportunity for participants to learn about the potential use of bioactive agents, such as heather and *Duddingtonia flagrans*, a natural strain of fungus isolated from the environment, as worm control tools. As anthelmintic resistance becomes an increasing issue for small ruminant farmers, these insights are crucial.

#### Interest in natural anthelmintics around the world

Participant engagement in this event demonstrated that there is a real interest in natural anthelmintics across the world. The main drivers are animal welfare, environmental concerns, a focus on “prevent, don’t correct”, and potential financial incentives. However, it has become apparent there is no “one magic silver bullet” to manage worms naturally; it requires a combination of solutions, from grazing management to targeted use of chemicals and natural anthelmintics.

The workshop confirmed that farmers are open to try natural alternatives for parasite control; 65% of the respondents present at the event had never heard about *Duddingtonia flagrans*’s anthelmintic properties, but once the scientific evidence was presented to them 93% expressed the wish to try the fungi as a natural anthelmintic. Supporting local knowledge with scientific data is important to limit risks and make informed decisions.

Consequently, further studies on how to incorporate natural anthelmintics for sustainable parasite control would be very welcome by farmers across Europe and the rest of the world.



Picture 1: Charlotte Blackler from Herb Majesty (Photo: Kerry Tuffee)



Picture 2: Sheep grazing on natural pasture (Photo taken from [Scotsman Food & Drink](#))



## Structure and content of the workshop

SRUC's Spiridoula Athanasiadou kicked off the event by discussing the cost of parasitism in livestock and why the [RELACS project](#) has focused on heather and fungi as two potential tools to address alternative worm control. Caroline Chylinski, also a researcher at SRUC continued the session sharing data from recent surveys about anthelmintic and antibiotic use in organic farms across Europe, and in the UK in particular. A considerable country specific variation in the use and need for anthelmintics and antibiotics in European organic farms was recorded. Based on the European survey data, it was estimated that 45.5 million of anthelmintic and 37 million of antibiotic treatments may be entering European organic livestock systems annually.

The following section was a conversation with three UK farmers: Charlotte Blackler, Katharine Sharp and Katy Whitby-Last. They shared their experiences using natural anthelmintics, the reasons for doing so, their perceived benefits, associated challenges, and best practices.

The event concluded with a lively and enthusiastic Q&A session, during which participants were able to ask questions, raise concerns and share their knowledge. [You can watch the event on the Oxford Real Farming Conference's YouTube channel.](#)



**Picture 3: Katharine Sharp from Achpopuli Farm** (Photo: Achpopuli Farm by Michael Mearns)  
**Picture 4: Katy Whitby-Last, Aberdeenshire goat farmer** (Photo taken from [Juki Club](#))

## About this news story and RELACS

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**RELACS:** 'Replacement of Contentious Inputs in Organic Farming Systems' (RELACS) builds on results of previous research projects and takes far-advanced solutions forward. As a system approach to sustainable agriculture, organic farming aims to effectively manage ecological processes whilst lowering dependence on off-farm inputs. The RELACS partners will evaluate solutions to further reduce the use of external inputs and, if needed, develop and adopt cost-efficient and environmentally safe tools and technologies.

**Project website:** [www.relacs-project.eu](http://www.relacs-project.eu)

**Social media:** Facebook ([RELACSeu](#)) & Twitter ([RELACEeu](#))

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