

Scrapie prevalence falls 40 per cent in four years

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THE prevalence of scrapie in British sheep has declined by 40 per cent over four years, according to new research.

The researchers say the decline is probably due to the success of policies like the Ram Genotyping Scheme and the Compulsory Scrapie Flocks Scheme, introduced in 2001 and 2004, respectively.



Analysis by the Institute for Animal Health (IAH) has provided evidence that the prevalence of scrapie in sheep in Great Britain was 'approximately constant' to 2003, before declining by around 40 per cent between 2003 and 2007.

One of the report's authors Dr Simon Gubbins, of the institute's Mathematical Biology Group, said it was not possible to identify the precise causes of the reduction.

"However, it is likely that the various scrapie control schemes that have been in place in recent years have contributed to this welcome decline in the prevalence of the disease," he said.

The data for the study was provided to the IAH by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. It came from clinical investigations of reported scrapie cases, an abattoir survey of apparently healthy animals over 18 months of age slaughtered for human consumption and a fallen stock survey of animals over 18 months of age found dead on farm.

Genotype data was provided by the National Scrapie Plan Advisory Centre.

The findings from the Defra funded research have just been published in the journal *Epidemiology and Infection*.

Scrapie - one of a number of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) - has been recognised in British sheep flocks since 1732.

The disease is being studied closely because TSEs are potentially transmissible to humans. Allied to this are concerns that scrapie could be masking BSE in sheep.

There, however, is no evidence to date that scrapie could be transmissible to humans or that natural infection of sheep with BSE has occurred.