



FACTSHEET

Managing facial eczema on-farm

Key messages

- Prevention is essential – there is no cure for FE.
- Use a mix of tools: pasture management, zinc supplementation and breeding.
- The right zinc dose matters. Too little = no protection. Too much = toxicity.
- Always check spore counts before stopping prevention.

Pasture management

Spores live in the pasture, mostly at the base in the dead litter.

Reducing risk

- Avoid high-risk (hot) paddocks with high FE spore counts.
- Fence off wet, sheltered spots as these have higher FE spore counts. **Still ensure that animals have access to shade and shelter.**
- Keep grazing light during risk periods to leave higher post-grazing residuals.
- Consider moving mobs every 1–2 days during high-risk periods to avoid grazing into the base of the sward.
- Supplementary feed reduces pasture and spore intake.

Forages

Certain grasses such as ryegrass and browntop carry higher FE risk. Add low-risk forages to your system if you farm in an FE-prone area.

- See this Beef + Lamb New Zealand Factsheet [Tackle FE risk with forages](#) for more information.
- Consult your local agronomist, vet or farm supply store representative for tailored advice.

HIGH

Cocksfoot, ryegrass, Yorkshire fog, browntop, dogstail, fine fescues.

MEDIUM

Paspalum, danthonia.

LOW

Chicory, plantain, legumes (lotus, white and red clover), kikuyu, tall fescue, sweet vernal.

Zinc protection

Zinc binds to sporidesmin (the toxin produced by the fungus associated with FE, *Pseudopithomyces toxicarius*) and prevents damage to the liver and bile ducts. The timing of zinc supplementation will differ between farms. A practical guide is to start zinc 2–3 weeks before pasture spore counts are expected to reach 30,000 spores/gram, so animals are protected before FE risk increases.



Why the correct dose matters

Too little zinc = no protection

Too much zinc = toxicity

Signs of zinc toxicity:

- Poor appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Tired and slow (lethargic)
- Drop in milk production
- Yellow eyes, gums, skin, vulva
- Weight loss
- Death

These signs are similar to signs of FE so don't assume more zinc is needed. Clarify the cause before changing your dosing regime.

Check zinc levels

Blood test 2 weeks after full dosing. See your animal health advisor to organise this testing.

- Milking herds can use bulk milk zinc tests (see [ZincCheck](#)).

Ways to give zinc

Bullets / Boluses: most reliable. Do **not** combine with other zinc sources as this risks zinc toxicity. Protection lasts up to 6 weeks so retreatment may be needed.

Zinc oxide drench: effective if daily or twice weekly. Monitor FE spore counts to ensure drenching intervals are correct. Ensure the drench is suitable for animal dosing.

In feed: more reliable than water, but some animals eat more than others, so dosing is inconsistent.

In water: least reliable; animals drink different amounts and water with zinc is less palatable.

For other forms of zinc supplementation such as zinc salt blocks or zinc added into fertiliser there is no research data to suggest these give consistent levels of Zinc. The amounts are unlikely to be at a level that is protective for FE.

Note: Copper supplementation may increase the severity of sporidesmin-related liver toxicity. If copper is being given during FE season, please consult your veterinarian or animal health advisor before continuing.

Fungicide

- Not selective – also kills beneficial fungi.
- Kills fungus, not spores.
- Must be applied **before** spore counts rise.
- Only lasts up to six weeks, keep monitoring to know when to reapply. Follow manufacturer's instructions for use and limitations.

If spore counts are already high, spraying won't help to reduce the spore number.

Breeding for FE tolerance

Long term strong solution.

- Sheep breeders have selected FE-tolerant lines since the 1980s.
- Many rams are available with FE tolerance data.
- Dairy and beef farmers can use FE-tolerant bull teams from breeding companies.

See B+LNZ Factsheet [Facial eczema - breeding matters](#) for details.

Supporting animals with FE signs

While there is no cure for FE, some things may help support the animal through the FE season if they have minor clinical signs of FE:

- Keep them off lush grass.
- Provide supplements; hay, baleage, or grains
- Provide shade. If possible provide complete darkness (such as in a woolshed with windows covered).
- Use "sunblock" products like topical zinc.

There may be other support remedies. Please contact your vet or animal health advisor for more information.

Resources

This resource is part of the [Farmer Facial Eczema Toolkit](#) on the B+LNZ Knowledge Hub. Head there to find out more.

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