UK stakeholders' views on sheep welfare priorities and PLF tools

TechCare's central approach is to engage stakeholders with the project's development. In the UK, two series of national workshops have been carried out to date. The first workshop (12 participants), was held online in May 2021, and focused on welfare issues and priorities affecting the UK sheep farming industry. Between them, participants brought a breadth and depth of experience to the discussion with representatives from the farming, research, veterinary, advisory, value chain and academic sectors. The consensus regarding the prioritization of sheep welfare issues in the UK was: 1) lameness, 2) ectoparasites, 3) nutrition (under- or over-), 4) gastrointestinal parasites, 5) liver fluke, 6) dystocia and 7) tail docking. After discussion within the whole project consortium, precision farming tools that could potentially help manage some of these welfare concerns were identified and presented back to stakeholders for their feedback, during a second workshop held in September 2021. The eight stakeholders who took part were asked to gauge each tool's perceived potential to tackle welfare issues and cost-effectiveness. Tools discussed included ultra-high frequency and low frequency readers and ear-tags, accelerometer and geo-localization wearables, GPS and proximity sensors, electronic identification enabled weigh-crate and, environmental sensors. Practicalities (e.g. common grazing, dispersed flocks), longevity and durability of the tools were mentioned as concerns as were upfront costs and ongoing running and maintenance costs. The need for support services to assist with data processing, analysis and interpretation was also mentioned.

Participants in one of the UK national workshops