In the past few weeks a number of horses have gone down with strangles on both sides of the border between the ACT and the authority. Normally this is a serious but non-life threatening disease of the horse’s respiratory tract. Infected horses can have copious nasal discharge and severe swelling around their throat area, hence the name.

Strangles is still a Notifiable Disease but no quarantine is imposed by the State for any incidence of the disease. The clinical signs are usually spectacular. I will never forget the first case I saw in the summer of 1969 in a pony that had just come home from a camp in Tumbarumba. There was a continuous thick creamy discharge from both nostrils that formed a ribbon from the horse’s nostrils to the ground.

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The main signs are a creamy nasal discharge and swollen lymph nodes around the throat area. The disease is caused by a bacterium Streptococcus equi equi and these bacteria can be spread by many methods. Apart from nose to nose transmission the bacteria can survive and remain infectious on soiled water, clothing, hands and tack.

Quite often the swollen lymph nodes burst and let out an amount of creamy yellow pus. If not attended to this discharge will mat on the skin and block any further discharge. It is best cleaned off with warm salty water. Antibiotics may help early in the disease but will not have much affect when the abscesses become mature. If the

Continued page 2
Sheep Health Statements are mandatory at Cooma Saleyards

By Dr Petrea Wait, District Veterinarian

As of 1st January 2013, all sheep being sold through the Cooma Saleyards must be accompanied by a Sheep Health Statement. Please note the following important points:

- Current Sheep Health Statements can be obtained from your livestock agent, the LHPA office or downloaded from www.farmbiosecurity.com.au under the “declarations and statements” tab. Do not use old statements.
- Sheep Health Statements are required in addition to the National Vendor Declaration/Waybill.
- The statement is a legal document. It needs to be completed accurately and signed.
- Both sides of the statement need to be completed. The Cooma-Monaro district is an Ovine Johne’s Disease (OJD) medium prevalence area (Category A: score 2).
- Assistance in completing forms can be sought from your livestock agent or LHPA staff.

The Sheep Health Statement is a biosecurity tool that must be completed by the seller with accurate information about the health status of the sheep that they are selling with regards to OJD, footrot and lice, and any treatments the animals have received. Sheep buyers can request to see the statement to ensure they are buying sheep of a known health status.

If you have any queries regarding the Sheep Health Statement, or any other livestock health matter call the South East LHPA offices on 6452 1122 (Cooma) or 6458 3055 (Bombala).

Spring liver fluke treatments

By Dr Ian Lugton, District Veterinarian

Spring, around the time of the last frosts, is an ideal time to treat the whole herd or flock strategically to reduce the fluke egg contamination of the farm prior to the pick-up of fluke recommencing. The fluke snail goes into hibernation during the colder months and the infective stage of the fluke is killed by frosts. Stock should not have picked new fluke burdens over winter. Eaten fluke taken around 12 weeks to mature. The fluke they harbour in spring will thus be adults which should be susceptible to all effective flukicides. This spring fluke treatment will boost liver function and appetite and allow your herd or flock to take best advantage of the spring flush of feed and to milk well.

Flucyclocycline that principally kill adult fluke will be satisfactory for use in spring. Such use will also allow drench rotation if you have previously been reliant on thiabendazole-based drenches or backlines used in the autumn. Note too that backlines are known to have poorer efficacy against fluke, and are generally more expensive than other treatment methods.

It is also a good idea to rotate drench groups, as resistance to triclabendazole is common in liver fluke. Alternative active ingredients that should kill adult fluke in cattle are any of the six chlorsulon/ivermectin combination injectables. The chlorsulon products are also registered for use in lactating dairy cows where they can be used with confidence for the spring drench of the whole herd. Any of the injectables are best used as an alternative to the triclabendazole drenches in the autumn, as it will clean up triclabendazole-resistant fluke and recently acquired immature fluke that are often an issue heading into the winter.

Alternatives to triclabendazole in sheep are any of the numerous closantel-containing oral drenches which should also kill Barber’s Pole worms surviving in sheep through the winter.

Anaemia now a serious threat to cattle on and near the coast

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As March flies and sucking lice are also implicated.

Cattle that have never been exposed to any Theileria strains may develop severe diseases. Typically this is when susceptible heavily-pregnant cattle are introduced to a coastal district from further inland. After a month or two, the cows begin to abort late-term calves, develop a fever and severe anaemia. Affected animals may appear jaundiced, lethargic, depressed, hollow and weak. The last calving season has seen many calves infected with illness occurring when calves are six to 16 weeks old. Calf deaths are now the most commonly encountered form of Theileriosis seen in coastal areas. If you notice hollow and lethargic calves that are white around the gums and eyes, they very likely have Theileriolaris. They will usually have a fever, may froth a little around the mouth and can show signs of pneumonia.

Successful control relies upon prevention as currently available treatments are not effective. If introducing stock, especially bulls, late pregnant heifers or cows, consider tick and fly control for the first month or two. Products such as the ‘medcin’ drenches and pour-on insecticides/repellents have been found effective in controlling ticks and flies for several weeks after one application. These products can be employed to reduce pasture tick infestation with regular use and may head off a problem with your calves this coming spring when the ticks become active again. Contact your local vet for more information.

DISCLAIMER - The discussion of an animal health product within this newsletter should not be taken as a specific endorsement for such a product. Mention of these products or their uses is for information purposes and to draw attention to their existence in the marketplace.

Rachael Kurtz, Sydney University veterinary intern, assisting with an autopsy on a beast that died from chronic Brucellosis poisoning.

Older cattle eating small amounts of bracken over a number of years may become severely anaemic through blood loss from tumours of the urinary bladder, as was the case with this cow from Buckajo.

How do you know if your drenches are working?

By Dr Ian Lugton, District Veterinarian

Benchmarking groups in the north of the State have shown that the differences between most and least profitable sheep businesses have little to do with variation in prices received, such prices are mostly out of your control anyway. Profitability is mostly to do with on-farm productivity. Producing more of a commodity from cost-effective inputs – something you do have control over.

Worms are a major cause of low productivity, either through deaths or production loss. Sheep produce less wool, meat and lambs from what they consume when they have worms. Worms make sheep less efficient and sheep deaths have a large impact on efficiency. An effective worm control program has been recently shown to reduce the annual cost of worms by $5.20 per ewe; this occurs despite more money having been spent on drenches and worm testing.

There are two important considerations that you should keep in mind regarding the cost of drenching. These are firstly that the most expensive drench you will ever use is the one you need to give, but then doesn’t work, and secondly, the next most expensive drench is the one you gave when you didn’t need to.

So how are you going to ensure that you optimise your worm control and avoid wasting money on drenches? Worm burden monitoring, usually by faecal egg counting, is the answer. Such services are available through many providers, including some local vets and rural merchants. Checking worm burdens prior to drenching can help you decide what species of worms you have and whether there are enough there to warrant a drench. If you check for eggs after drenching, usually at 10 to 14 days, you will also be able to see if the drench has failed to remove all the worms. If egg counts are above zero, this suggests that you unwittingly used an ineffective drench. This is a VERY common problem. The drench used was a waste of time and money as the parasites showed resistance to it.

In recent surveys in NSW it is becoming increasingly clear that drench resistance in sheep and cattle worms is common. Only rarely is it useful now to employ single-active drenches. That cheap drum of clear, or white, or ivermectin drench may work out to be very expensive when it hasn’t done the job. For routine drenching three or four-way active drenches are now recommended. However, there are situations around where even these are not fully effective.

Small landholders, in particular, face the issue of possibly only being able to get the right drench or a multi-active drench in a large drum. This may be an expensive purchase which you might use in a decade or so; something beyond the shelf-life. This is also a problem for larger properties that wish to conduct a drench test where only 15 sheep may be drenched with certain formulations.

This issue may be overcome by approaching your private vet and asking them if they can dispense small quantities of some of the more effective products that only come in larger drums. There are local vets who will provide this service. A great website for further information on sheep worms, drenches and regional drench decision guides is www.wormboss.com.au.

Strangles in horses in and around the ACT

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infected horse has an abscess in an internal lymph node then the condition is called bastard strangles and may be fatal. Also an occasional horse may develop purpura haemorrhagica which affects the blood vessels and is usually fatal.

There is a vaccine against this disease that is reasonably effective. It usually won’t stop a few horses becoming infected but definitely slows down the spread of the disease. An initial course of three shots should be followed by an annual booster. The vaccine will not have any effect on a horse clinically infected with strangles.

This is the third time strangles has been reported in this area in the past five years. I would urge anybody with a horse to get it vaccinated against strangles. You should also develop a biosecurity plan for your property and include measures against strangles in the plan.

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Potential poisonings when grazing phalaris pastures

By Bryden Kreps
Final year vet student, CSU Wagga

Phalaris is a valuable pasture species but occasionally causes toxicity problems. These problems are more common in sheep but can still occur in cattle occasionally. The toxicity of the plant varies with the stage of growth and is affected by weather, high soil nitrogen, low light intensities and high temperatures. Problems will generally occur during autumn, late winter and early spring when animals are put onto young, rapidly growing pastures. Be especially careful when introducing stock on to a young phalaris pasture after they have been grazing poor quality, low protein paddocks such as during autumn.

Phalaris contains a number of toxic principles which can cause three different types of poisoning. Indole alkaloids are responsible for phalaris staggers and urea cycle enzyme inhibitors cause the two sudden death syndromes; a cardiac and phalaris polioencephalomalacia (PE) like syndrome.

Sudden death

There are two types of sudden death syndrome associated with phalaris poisoning. Deaths often occur after feed deprivation, so avoid introducing new or hungry livestock to freshly shooting phalaris pastures during autumn or winter. It is also recommended that sheep are full of feed when put onto shooting phalaris pastures. In addition, supplement animals with hay when they are put onto phalaris pastures to prevent the livestock eating large quantities.

The cardiac disorder is rarely seen, however, affected sheep can die within 2-24 hrs of being put onto a phalaris pasture. These animals have a pounding heart and will collapse suddenly after mustering and either return to normal within a few minutes or die almost instantly. Dead sheep have extended necks and rigid limbs, with some evidence of thrashing before death. Froth and blood stained discharges from the mouth and nose may be present. There is no treatment.

The PE like syndrome is more common than the cardiac disorder and results in more animal deaths. Affected sheep appear nervous and walk aimlessly with a high stepping, stiff gait this becomes more obvious if the sheep are disturbed.

Severely affected sheep may start convulsing, although most animals are usually found dead along fence lines.

The urea cycle enzyme inhibitor found in phalaris affects the urea and nitrogen breakdown in the animal’s liver resulting in ammonia toxicity that affects the brain. The higher the nitrogen concentration in the phalaris shoots the more animals that will be affected. Animals that survive usually recover within 48 to 72 hours. The liver of surviving animals compensates for the toxic effects by producing more of the urea cycle enzyme.

Phalaris staggers:

Only ruminants are affected by phalaris staggers, outbreaks usually occur within a few days of grazing phalaris pastures but in some cases the staggers will not be seen until several months after grazing. The newer varieties of phalaris such as Holdfast, Sirosa and Sirolan have been developed with lower levels of the alkaloids responsible for the staggers. The staggers are characterised by nervous signs, which persist even when sheep are removed from the toxic pasture. Affected sheep may have a persistent nodding of the head, weakness in the front legs, leg tremors and falling. Affected cattle can have chewing and swallowing problems which can result in weight loss and occasionally they may also have mild hind leg weakness, poor coordination and an excitable temperament.

Treating sheep with cobalt can prevent this form of poisoning but it will not cure affected sheep or prevent the other forms. Cobalt assists the rumen microflora to incorporate the toxic alkaloids into vitamin b-12 like compounds that are not harmful to the animal. Legumes and ingested soil contains dietary cobalt which can be preventative but soils are deficient in cobalt the animals will not be able to ingest enough cobalt. Slow release rumen cobalt bullets can be given to prevent phalaris staggers.

References


Rendell 2012, ‘The role of Cobalt in the risk assessment and prevention of phalaris staggers’, Flock & Herd, Livestock Intel Hamilton Australia.'