



Welcome to Edition 2 of our 'Out the Back' sheep and beef newsletter. What a season it has been with ewe scanning percentages generally up followed by good grass growth, a good lamb schedule continuing and an amazing beef schedule.

I was chatting to one farmer in the Mangamingi valley who commented "now I know how the dairy cockies feel when they have a record payout season!" An El Nino weather pattern has been predicted for summer which generally/potentially brings above average rainfall for the west coast so it could be shaping up to be a kind summer.

On the animal health front, the tick spread disease Theileria, which was talked about in the last newsletter, has been diagnosed on a couple of dairy farms in our area over the last 18 months and very recently in a beef calf. The calf presented as lethargic and pale in its gums. Theileria is likely to affect younger stock more severely. Don't hold back from giving us a call if you have animals showing similar signs.

Lepto in farmers has been a bit of a hot topic in the press lately and the disease has recently affected one of our drystock farmers. A month after contracting the disease he is still suffering aches and fatigue. We have included a lepto article below with some notes and a few tips to help prevent you contracting this nasty disease. Importantly you should be aware of the flu-like symptoms caused by the disease which warrant a trip to the doctor.

### Lepto

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that is spread in the urine of infected animals. It can infect all mammals however of particular importance to us is the fact it affects cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, rodents and even possums. Different strains will cause different signs in different species. In more severe cases of infection you will see lethargy, death and abortion. Many infected animals will be subclinical carriers so they show no signs of infection but shed bacteria in their urine.

In people leptospirosis may be present when suffering from flu-like signs without respiratory symptoms like 'running nose' or 'cough'. This means you should ask your GP to be tested for leptospirosis when you have severe head and body ache, painful hyper-sensitivity against light, fever and other typical signs resembling a flu. The disease can be very debilitating and sometimes leave patients affected for weeks and months.

Lepto is typically spread when the bacteria in urine splashes enters the body through the mucous membranes of the mouth, eyes and nose or small cuts or cracks in hands. Dairyfarmers tend to be more at risk of contracting lepto due to splashes of cow urine during milking however there are certain practices on drystock properties that are high risk such as calvings, lambings, dealing with bearings and doing dog tuckers for example.

When dealing with the above to help protect yourself, particularly in unvaccinated animals, it is not hard to slip on a pair of rectal gloves which can be held up at the bicep by a cut out donut of old inner tube. Slipping on a pair of short gloves over the long gloves can make things easier to feel. A couple of snaplock bags with rectal gloves in the carrier on your bike during spring will make sure they are on hand.

If you have cuts or abrasions then cover them up. If you get a splash of urine in the eye then wash it out. And simple personal hygiene measures like washing your hands before eating or smoking after handling livestock can all help

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[www.elthamvetservice.co.nz](http://www.elthamvetservice.co.nz)

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## Facial Eczema

Facial eczema (FE) is caused by the ingestion of sporidesmin (a toxin) which is found at the base of the grass sward in dead material. Sporidesmin in the animal leads to liver damage which then prevents the normal removal of a plant pigment, phylloerythrin, from the blood. When the plant pigment is in superficial blood vessels, it reacts with UV light from the sun and causes skin lesions.

However these classical skin lesions are only the tip of the iceberg. Numerous studies give an indication that up to 50% of a mob can have liver damage with only about 3% showing the typical skin lesions. The real impact comes from the liver damage caused by the sporidesmin.

The subclinical liver damage can have a big impact on production and reproduction.

There is no effective treatment for the liver once it has been damaged. However, the liver does have capacity to recover itself as long as the damage has not been too extensive. Unfortunately it is not easy to predict which animals' livers will and won't recover. Sheep are most susceptible to facial eczema followed by dairy cattle then beef cattle.

Shelter is important for relief from the sun in animals showing clinical signs.

### **Risky time periods:**

The toxin tends to be present in late summer and autumn, and during periods of warm, light rain.

Temperatures ideal for toxin production are hot days (10-30°C) and soil temperatures greater than 12°C at

## FE Prevention is key:

- ◆ Southern facing hills are safer during risky times as they tend to dry out in the wind.
- ◆ Monitor spore counts in your area.
- ◆ Pasture management: lower stocking rates, high pre and post grazing levels (since spores are at grass base). Do not top paddocks.
- ◆ In high risk paddocks, cultivars can be changed to lower risk species such as chicory and red clover and summer crops can minimise exposure at high risk times.
- ◆ Using Facial Eczema tolerant rams. Tolerance to FE is very strongly heritable in sheep ( $H^2 = 0.45$ ). In high risk regions we could expect a reasonable level of natural selection for tolerance and some studs are breeding rams that are genetically tolerant.
- ◆ Zinc treatment should begin at least 2-3 weeks before spore counts become dangerous.

### **Options for zinc provision include:**

- Zinc oxide weekly drench could be practical in some situations (valuable stock).
- Zinc sulphate in drinking water (it is not palatable so introduce gradually at low doses).
- Slow release Zinc capsules given about 7-10 days before anticipated rise in spore counts and repeated every 4-6 weeks as needed while risk remains high. This is the most practical zinc preventative method in extensive systems. Treating stock such as rams, breeding cattle, grazing heifers to reduce the

### Mother-in-law killed

*A newlywed farmer and his wife were visited by her mother, who immediately demanded an inspection of the place. The farmer had genuinely tried to be friendly to his new mother-in-law, hoping that it could be a friendly, non-antagonistic relationship. All to no avail though, as she kept nagging them at every opportunity, demanding changes, offering unwanted advice, and generally making life unbearable to the farmer and his new bride.*

*While they were walking through the barn, during the forced inspection, the farmer's mule suddenly reared up and kicked the mother-in-law in the head, killing her instantly. It was a shock to all no matter their feelings toward her demanding ways.*

*At the funeral service a few days later, the farmer stood near the casket and greeted folks as they walked by. The pastor noticed that whenever a woman would whisper something to the farmer, he would nod his head yes and say something. Whenever a man walked by and whispered to the farmer, however, he would shake his head no, and mumble a reply.*

*Very curious as to this bizarre behavior, the pastor later asked the farmer what that was all about.*

*The farmer replied, The women would say, 'What a terrible tragedy' and I would nod my head and say, 'Yes, it was.' The men would then ask, 'Can I borrow that mule?' and I would shake my head and say, 'Can't. It's booked up for a year.'"*



## Ewe Vaccinations - Toxo & Campy

'Toxo' (toxoplasmosis) and 'Campy' (campylobacteriosis) are two potentially devastating abortion-causing diseases for which we have very good vaccines. While a farmer may get away with not vaccinating for years, there is no telling when a Toxo or Campy abortion storm might hit, the consequences of which can be devastating. Abortion storms aside, there is a 3% increase in lambs born to Toxo-vaccinated flocks and up to 9% increase in Campy-vaccinated flocks. This increase in lambing percentage easily covers the cost of vaccinating.

### Toxo

Toxoplasmosis is shed through cats who ingest infected birds or rodents and pass the infective stage in their faeces onto pasture. Sheep grazing on this contaminated feed pick up the disease and if this occurs for the first time during pregnancy can lead to early loss of foetus, abortion or birth of weak/dead lambs.

Often you won't see abortions but just a reduced scanning percentage or a lot of late or wet/dry ewes.

**Toxovax®** is a single dose vaccine that provides breeding ewes with lifetime protection against the effects of Toxoplasmosis. **Vaccination should be done at least 4 weeks before mating.**

Toxovax is a live vaccine, has a short shelf life and is made to order so **please order your Toxovax from us at least four weeks before you need it, which should be at least 8 weeks before mating**, to ensure supply.

### Campy

Campylobacter is present on 88% of New Zealand farms and is the most common infectious cause of abortions on NZ farms. This occurs when susceptible animals ingest contaminated feed or water, or by direct contact with infected fetuses or fetal membranes. Scavenging birds such as the Black Backed Gull may become vectors and spread the disease between paddocks and even farms. After infection, the organism is present in discharges for up to six weeks, with some ewes becoming longer-term carriers. Infection can persist on a farm for a number of years in carrier sheep without overt signs of disease. Hoggets or two toothers are most at risk but mixed age ewes who have not been previously exposed are still at risk too.

## **Drench Testing**

It's that time again when drench companies roll out their Christmas giveaways to draw your eye to their products and pry those hard earned dollars from your wallet ... the big question should not be whether or not you get a free ham with your drench but is this drench really right for my stock?

Farmers are creatures of habit and if it has worked for them before it will sure as hell work for them again but in the case of drenches that may not always be the case.

Over the last few years we have been conducting Faecal Egg Count Reduction tests for farmers around the area who are interested in finding out the effectiveness of drench families on their properties. What we have found is, like most areas in NZ, we have resistance to at least one or more drench families on farms here in Taranaki. We have known for a while now that single active drenches containing just a white (Benzimidazoles/BZs) or clear (Levamisole) drench type is relatively ineffective with resistance as high as 85% recorded in NZ on samples sent to the lab in 2013, but the more worrying trend is the development of resistance to some combo drenches (especially BZ/levamisole combos) and the decline of effectiveness of Moxidectin on some farms. Moxidectin is present in products such as Eweguard, Exodus and Cydectin and is used as long term protection for ewes and also haemonchus control and would leave a large hole in the tools available to farmers if resistance was to develop further.

There has been a lot of work done into establishing some proper guidelines and practises for farmers to take to avoid drench resistance on their farm. Feeding animals well to lower impact of worms, grazing crops to lower pasture contamination, leaving certain mature stock undrenched to maintain refugia and using an appropriate drench have all been advocated to help curve the trend towards resistance. The last one is where we can help; Faecal Egg Count Reduction test (FECRT) is something we have been offering to farmers for a while now with mixed uptake but it offers a vital piece of information to your drench choice and should be done every few years by every farmer to avoid wasting thousands of dollars on products that just don't cut the mustard. We test up to five drenches on your property by collecting faecal samples at the start, drenching them and mark them as to which drench was used and collecting a follow up faecal sample to measure the eggs left 7 days later. We offer this service at a reduced cost of \$500 which includes everything involved and covers testing up to 70 lambs. The best time to do this is mid-summer when the worm counts are nice and high.

## Ram Testing

Getting your rams tested next year is still an important date on your mating calendar, not just to look for Brucellosis but also to rule out rams unfit for the upcoming season.

As you all know Brucellosis main damage to your flock is through ram infertility and ram wastage. We do not often see reductions in scanning results in flocks with positive rams as usually high numbers of rams can mask the effect of a Brucella outbreak, but if it is left untreated it can lead to a very high turnover of rams due to lesions forming and affecting sperm production and passage of semen through the epididymis.

Even with the vast amount of testing we do now, Brucellosis is not by any means a disease on the out and it can pop up on any farm, no matter how long you have tested clear as one farmer found out last year. The farmer had tested clear for Brucella for over 10 years and last year had to cull nearly half of his rams due to Brucella after one was found with a lesion during ram testing. The outbreak was traced to a couple of wild rams which had been living in a bush block at the back of the ram paddock and some 'not so sheep proof' fencing. This was a costly reminder of how easily an outbreak can occur and that we have to keep our finger on the pulse in regards to ram management all year round.

Some golden rules for your rams:

- **Never buy a ram without seeing a current *B. ovis* accreditation certificate.** There are still some breeders around the country with no accreditation program in place so to make sure your money is being well spent, assure the stud and rams are accredited free of Brucellosis.
- **Remove stray/neighbours rams as soon as possible.** And if needed by any means necessary! Stray rams can very quickly spread Brucellosis throughout your rams so treat any unknown ram as infected.
- **Get your rams checked every year by your vet.** All rams should be palpated and at least 20 bled every year to reduce the impact on your flock if you are unlucky enough to have an outbreak.
- **Don't buy dog tucker rams.** These are being 'retired' for a reason and a high percentage can be infected!
- **Keep ram paddocks away from any boundaries and your boundaries well fenced.**
- **Communicate with your neighbours!**



## Flystrike



The beautiful summer days are coming but unfortunately so is the cheeky blowfly. Flystrike continues to be a condition that causes management headaches on many properties and is a major cost to farm business.

Each year in New Zealand, it is estimated that 1.3-2.3 million sheep are affected by flystrike, at least 250,000 lambs die from flystrike and that following treatment, recovery of lost liveweight may take up to 6 weeks. Many of you will already have given lambs a treatment at docking, and now is the time to be thinking ahead to the ewes, and further prevention in lambs. You will have been sent out a flyer from us recently informing you of the latest prevention options.

In certain areas resistance has developed to BPU actives which we no longer stock. The two preventative actives we currently stock are Dicyclanil for spray-on and Cyromazine for jetting. Both of these actives have been used in Australia for a number of years now and it is good to see there have been no signs of resistance developing.

There are two Cyromazine based products which also come mixed with a 'knockdown' active to treat animals which have already become flystruck. Getting the timing correct with regards to the recommended number of days off shears for each product is



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*A farmer and his brand new bride were riding home from the chapel in a wagon pulled by a team of horses, when the older horse stumbled.*

*The farmer said, That's once."*

*A little further along, the poor old horse stumbled again.*

*The farmer said, That's twice."*

*After a little, while the poor old horse stumbled again.*

*The farmer didn't say anything, but reached under the seat, pulled out a shotgun and shot the horse.*

*His brand new bride yelled, telling him, That was an awful thing to do."*

*The farmer said, That's once."*