Animal Health Update

J-BAS, last minute biosecurity plans & LPA accreditation

District Veterinarian Tim Biffin

As many producers would know, the J-BAS (Johne's Beef Assurance Score) system, which has been in play now since mid-2016, assigns producers a score from 0 to 8; with 8 being highest reassurance of disease freedom and 0 the lowest (termed “unmanaged risk”).

As of 1 July 2017 the J-BAS system is moving into its “implementation phase”. Beef producers aiming to maintain a high-level market reassurance of disease freedom should have considered their need for a private on farm biosecurity plan.

Markets that may require a higher J-BAS level for trade include:
- interstate sale of cattle (WA & NT)
- international live export
- stud and store sales.

Originally the deadline of 1 July 2017 for implementation meant that those NSW beef producers without a biosecurity plan in place would drop down to a J-BAS of 0, as the risk on their farm is considered “unmanaged”.

Since the last Riverina Local Land Services Animal Health Update this has changed. NSW beef producers have been given a J-BAS of 6 (instead of 0) as at 30 June 2017.

How long this score will be valid for without an on farm biosecurity plan is yet to be confirmed – so it is highly recommended that producers complete a biosecurity plan for their farms as soon as possible.

Importantly, earlier this month the Livestock Production Assurance (LPA) program administrator announced changes to their requirements for accreditation.

As of 1 October 2017 producers will be required to have an on-farm biosecurity plan in place and have completed some on-line training and assessment, every three years. Having this biosecurity plan in place is likely to satisfy the voluntary J-BAS criteria, “killing two birds with one stone”.

These changes have been industry driven. Although the NSW government has been involved in the “discussion” it is not the lead organisation. For this reason to clarify our (Riverina Local Land Services) role in all this:

Biosecurity staff (officers and vets) may review, answer questions and help producers generally in the process of validating a biosecurity plan (we will not develop a plan for you).

District Veterinarians may investigate suspect clinical cases on the grounds of surveillance (especially given the suspected prevalence of BJD in NSW beef is very currently close to 0%).

District Veterinarians will not perform herd level testing for the purpose of market access (that is,
obtaining a score 7 or 8). This is for the purpose of individual commercial gain and is solely a role for private veterinarians.

There are plenty of resources available online (including templates) to help producers to develop their own biosecurity plan.

I would recommend all producers, sheep or cattle or other, to browse through some of these resources available on the Animal Health Australia and Livestock Biosecurity Network’s webpages.

Most producers practice good biosecurity already. These practices are imperative to maintaining and improving our agriculture.

The documentation of these practices can be used as a means of market assurance. This is particularly relevant when we consider international trade negotiations and Australia’s “clean-green” image.

As other nations improve their production systems to satisfy market demands, we need to improve our own systems to remain one step in front.

**Animal Health Australia (webpage):**  

**Livestock Biosecurity Network (webpage):**  

For further discussion or advice, please feel free to contact your local district vet.

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**RAM - Why preventing access is important**  
**District Veterinarian Kristy Stone**

**What is RAM?**

- Restricted Animal Material (RAM) is any meat, meat and bone meal, blood meal, poultry offal meal, feather meal, fishmeal or any other animal meals or manures.
- These CANNOT be fed to ruminants (cattle, sheep, goats or deer).
- RAM can contain tiny proteins called prions that survive rendering processes and cause disease in susceptible species (ruminants, and also humans).

- RAM is commonly found in stock feed for poultry and pigs.

**Why is RAM a concern?**

- Feeding RAM was the cause of the spread of Mad Cow Disease in the UK and Europe.
- Mad Cow Disease (cattle) and Scrapie (sheep) are diseases called Transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) – diseases that don’t occur in Australia (and we’d like to keep it that way).
- Our domestic and export markets would be extensively damaged should TSEs occur in Australia.

- It is illegal in Australia to feed/or allow ruminants access to RAM.

**What are the signs of TSEs in sheep and cattle?**

- **Cattle:** Increased nervousness, staggery gait, increased sensitivity to touch and sound, muscle tremors.
- **Sheep:** Persistent itching, staggery gait, wasting.
- Animals can be infected long before clinical signs become apparent.

**Steps to make sure you are doing the right thing**

1. Do not feed animal materials to ruminants.
2. Purchase only labelled feeds.
3. Read the label/docket of all stock feed – Only feed ruminants stock feed that is labelled “THIS PRODUCT DOES NOT CONTAIN RESTRICTED ANIMAL MATERIAL”.
4. Store stock feed containing RAM (poultry & pig feed) away from ruminant feed sources.
5. Prevent the access of ruminants to poultry & pig pens – this includes preventing access to poultry litter.
6. Have neurological cases examined by a vet – if animals suit the criteria, you may be eligible to receive an incentive payment through the TSE surveillance program – an important program that allows us to prove to export markets our continued freedom from these diseases.
Management strategies to improve lamb survival

District Veterinarian Kristy Stone

The loss of lambs between lambing and weaning is a major component of reproductive wastage.

The most important determinant of lamb survival is birthweight which is heavily influenced by ewe body condition during pregnancy, particularly during late pregnancy.

Ewes in ideal body condition (CS3) at lambing give birth to heavier lambs than ewes in poorer body condition (CS 2). Birth weights are most sensitive to changes in ewe condition in late pregnancy – an increase in one body condition score of the ewe, can increase lamb birth weight by up to 0.5kg.

Poor nutrition can also impact negatively on maternal behavior and milk production resulting in mis-mothering and starvation.

Managing twin and single bearing ewes separately can help tailor nutritional requirements to increase birthweight in twin lambs while reducing an increase in dystocia in single-born lambs. Ewe body condition can be easily monitored during pregnancy allowing feed to be adjusted accordingly.

While dystocia can be associated with over-feeding of fat ewes (CS4 or higher) in late-pregnancy, (particularly single bearing ewes) poor ewe pelvic development, incorrect sire selection and malposition will also contribute to dystocia and should be considered if dystocia is occurring.

Protection from shelter is important to minimize susceptibility to starvation particularly in smaller lambs (particularly twins). Rows of tall grass, trees, shrubs, or native tussocks can provide adequate shelter to reduce wind chill. Importantly paddocks also need to be selected based on feed availability, low work risk and size of the paddock/mob.

Lamb losses due to predators is often secondary to other conditions (exposure, starvation, or mis-mothering) however can account for 5-10% losses and shouldn’t be overlooked. Baiting for foxes should commence prior to and during lambing.

Investigating lamb deaths can help tailor management strategies for lamb survival in subsequent years.

Summary

1. Ewe nutrition is VERY important
   a) Ewes in better condition give birth to heavier lambs.
   b) Aim for BCS 3 in ewes during pregnancy - higher for twin bearing ewes.
   c) Monitor BCS regularly.
   d) Scanning for twins/singles to tailor nutritional requirements.

2. Paddock selection
   a) Reduce wind chill
   b) Small lambs, particularly twins are most susceptible to wind chill
   c) Prepare paddocks well in advance (something to keep in mind for next year)

3. Predator control

4. Investigate lamb deaths

Riverina Local Land Services
District Veterinarians

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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Contact Details</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Tim Biffin and Emily Stearman 6923 6300</td>
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<td>Young</td>
<td>Elizabeth Braddon and Rahul Shankar 6381 4700</td>
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<td>Gundagai</td>
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other offices to cover during interim 6958 1800