Animal Health Update

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) real-time training in Nepal
by District Veterinarian Rahul Shankar

I was fortunate to be given an opportunity to attend FMD training in Nepal during December 2015. The program is run by the European Commission for the Control of FMD.

Twelve Australians from Western Australia, NSW, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania attended the training. These included veterinarians, livestock production managers, laboratory specialists, animal health officers and an epidemiologist. Sixteen groups of Australians have participated in the training to date.

Nepalese veterinary and animal biosecurity staff also attended the training, both from a collaborative perspective and to bolster their current control programs.

We received in-class training for a day, going over the clinical signs, disease progression and the appropriate samples and laboratory testing that should be undertaken for suspect FMD cases.

This was followed by three days of visiting suspect outbreaks, carrying out a full investigation of suspected cases, testing of samples onsite or at laboratory equipped facilities and performing analyses to trace the movements of animals and to trace source and the spread of infection.

FMD is endemic in Nepal and as such provides a prime setting to undertake training with animals that show actual symptoms of the disease.

The experience was a real eye opener, as it allowed participants to see the clinical effects of the disease in a current outbreak investigation; bringing home the reality of how serious this disease could be should it ever enter Australia.

I will be furthering this experience by presenting relevant material to colleagues, livestock producers and other industry partners in an effort to better educate all stakeholders as to the early recognition of FMD.

While Australia is currently free of FMD (a status we would ALWAYS like to maintain!), we need to be aware, vigilant and have trained personnel ready at a moment’s notice, should an exotic animal disease enter our borders.

What is FMD?

FMD is a virus that affects cloven-hoofed animals. The most susceptible being cattle, sheep, buffalo and pigs.

It causes a sudden decrease in production (lameness, low milking yields) and spreads rapidly via affected animals having close contact with other susceptible animals.

The disease is typically characterised by the formation of vesicles and erosions in the mouth, nose, teats and feet.

Why all the fuss about FMD?

Economic modelling of a hypothetical FMD outbreak showed that it would cost Australia approximately $52 billion over a decade following an outbreak.

The losses can be direct such as a decrease in milk production and lameness or through the cost of animals slaughtered. Losses may also be indirect; for instance through loss of trade.

Please contact your local veterinarian if you would like more information on FMD or other exotic animal diseases.

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Footrot rearing its ugly head

By District Veterinarian Tim Biffin

There has been an unprecedented incidence of virulent footrot cases over the last month. Producers need to consider this disease in their farm management: quarantine and monitor all new stock (sheep & goats), maintain boundary fences and contact their district veterinarian if they have any concerns with new or existing stock.

The Footrot Strategic Plan continues as one of the state’s great biosecurity successes. Throughout the 80s and 90s, hard-work from both producers and RLPB staff earned NSW the formidable ‘Protected Area’ status in 2009. Meaning less than 1% of properties in NSW are affected with virulent footrot. However, the disease has not been eradicated and remains a risk to sheep and goat producers.

One of the problems with footrot is that it is a ‘fair weather’ disease. If environmental conditions are not right, affected sheep may seem normal, even though they are carrying the causative bacteria. Conversely, when it is mild-warml and moist, footrot takes off.

It begins with inflammation between the claws and progresses to destruction of the sole and sometimes the wall of the hoof. The outcome is devastating for sheep welfare and production.

If you have lame sheep, with irritation between their claws, get us out to have a look at them as soon as possible and before you start any treatments such as footbathing.

Inspecting the mob generally involves examination of 100 or more sheep. Only when it is appropriate, lab testing may also be performed. It can be difficult to
distinguish virulent footrot from the milder strains of benign footrot or ‘scald’, and repeat examination may be required (often dependent on environmental conditions).

Thorough inspection of lame sheep is vitally important. It allows us to maintain the low prevalence of virulent footrot in NSW which our predecessors worked so hard to obtain. Many of us have never seen the ‘bad old days’ where footrot was rife across our region, and we need to keep up the hard work so that we never will.

Image 6: Scald – Interdigital dermatitis. Note: this can be the early stages of virulent footrot.

Image 7: This photo displays the bacteria in an active stage: eating under the sole of the hoof. The foot shears are being used to reflect the sole of the hoof and show the raw ("cottage cheese" like) tissue underneath.

Managing the risks of lead poisoning
by District Veterinarian Emily Stearman

Lead poisoning is the most common toxicity in cattle. Cattle are curious animals and poisoning occurs more commonly in young, inquisitive stock. Poisoning can result from a single large dose or ingesting smaller amounts over an extended period of time.

Lead poisoning is easily preventable by vigilance against accidental access. If lead containing products are contained inside sheds ensure accidental access does not occur if hungry stock intermittently graze around these sites.

A good knowledge of the common lead containing products is important: lead paint, lead batteries and waste motor oil. Other sources include lead lighting or pieces of lead based metals.

Good on-farm waste management is critical; a single rubbish site is best practice. Prevent stock gaining access to the waste dump or waste burning area.
Signs to monitor for: sudden death or a rapid onset of signs including excessive bellowing, head pressing, aimless wandering, circling, blindness, occasionally bloat; tetany and mania can occur close to death.

Animals who recover from the exposure or animals that are exposed to a source but appear unaffected can retain high lead levels for an extended period of time. This poses a significant food safety risk and as such, on-going monitoring is required.

For further information or any concerns do not hesitate to contact your local district veterinarian.

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