Animal Health Update

Strawberry footrot by District Veterinarian Emily Stearman

Despite the nature of the name, strawberry footrot is very different from virulent footrot. Throughout the Riverina, district veterinarians have seen a number of cases of strawberry footrot this season. This is a nasty disease that is caused by a combination of bacterial (*Dermatophilus congolensis*) and viral (parapox virus) infection.

Separately the bacteria can cause *Dermoatophilosis* (‘Dermo’ in wool) and the virus causes scabby mouth, often in young sheep; together these pathogens generate extravagant lesions around the feet and mouth.

The lesions caused by the disease can be severe. Stock may have reduced mobility and severe localised swelling often extending up the leg. Feed and water intake may be reduced by the combination of restricted mobility and oral pain when lesions occur around the lips concurrently.

The viral component of disease is zoonotic (contagious to humans). Gloves and other appropriate personal protective equipment should be worn when handling sheep with suspicious wounds.

It is very important that an accurate diagnosis is made so that appropriate treatment can be provided. Depending on the severity of the affected limb(s), animals often recover from the disease within 2-3 weeks when treatment and supportive care are provided.

Due to the nature and presentation of this disease we strongly recommend contacting your local district veterinarian if you see anything similar to the images.

Be on your guard! Mosquitoes are on the rise! A public health message by District Veterinarian Rahul Shankar

Active surveillance for vector borne diseases such as those from mosquitoes is ongoing throughout NSW and nationally on an annual basis.

Due to the recent surge in rain activity over the past few months, insect numbers, and in particular mosquitoes have risen significantly.
Recently the NSW Department of Health confirmed a positive Ross River fever detection in trapped mosquitoes in the Riverina region. The last time an isolate was detected in the region was in 1998-1999 and as such, public health officials are warning about the potential dangers of vector borne diseases.

Ross River fever (RRF), Kunjin virus (KV) and Murray Valley encephalitis (MVE) are diseases that can affect horses, but can also be transmitted to humans via bites from mosquitoes.

What are signs that my horse may be infected?

Horses can display a wide range of signs including fever, joint pain, lethargy, reluctance to move, respiratory signs, colic and neurological symptoms (uncoordinated movement predominantly).

What should I do?

Contact your local private veterinarian for a case work up and a diagnosis.

What can I do to prevent infection?

Adopt strict mosquito control strategies.

Mosquitoes are more active in the morning and evening and as such it is important to ensure that your horse is well covered during these time periods, with proper rug fittings from head to tail. Thicker cotton rugs and hoods with ear pieces will provide more complete protection.

Keep your horse(s) away from areas known to be populated by mosquitoes (such as standing water grounds) or from areas populated with the mosquitoes natural hosts – wallabies and kangaroos. Use long acting insect repellants, such as flygon, to provide added protection against mosquitoes.

What about humans, what are the signs that I may be affected?

Fevers, rash, muscle aches, fatigue, headaches, joint pain and stiffness are some of the symptoms. These are but to name a few of the symptoms as persons with RRV may display a wide range of clinical symptoms beyond what is listed above.

What should I do if I suspect I may have Ross River fever?

In all cases you should contact your local general practitioner or contact NSW Department of Health immediately on 1300 066 055.

What can I do to prevent infection?

- cover-up with a loose-fitting long sleeved shirt and long pants when outside
• apply mosquito repellent to exposed skin
• take special care during peak mosquito biting hours, especially around dawn and dusk
• remove potential mosquito breeding sites from around the home and screen windows and doors
• take extra precautions when travelling or camping in areas with a higher risk of mosquito-borne diseases.

Treating flystrike
by District Veterinarian Emily Stearman

Following on from last month’s article on flystrike prevention, for those unprevented cases these are the current recommendations for the treatment of flystrike.

There are five basic principles to follow when treating flystrike:

1. Shear struck wool and a 5cm barrier of clean wool around the strike. Shear close to the skin to remove maggots, without removing maggots you are not effectively removing strike. Machine shearing is far more effective than hand shears.

2. Unless maggot infested wool is collected and bagged, most maggots will survive, pupate and come back as adult flies. Collect all infested wool in a fly proof (plastic) bag and leave the bag in the sun for a couple of days to kill all maggots, breaking the life cycle.

3. Apply a registered flystrike dressing to the shorn area to prevent restrike. The dressing has two purposes:
   a. to kill remaining maggots
   b. to prevent restrike as the affected area is drying and healing.

   If maggots are still present in the wound a rapid kill dressing containing either ivermectin, spinosyn or organophosphates should be applied.

   If necessary, these treated sheep may be jetted or backlined along with other susceptible sheep to provide long-term flystrike protection. The two common flystrike preventatives are dicyclanil (for example CLiK) and cyromazine (for example Vetrazin). Pay close consideration to the withhold periods of products selected.

4. Remove struck sheep from the mob. Leaving struck sheep in the mob attracts blowflies. Moving struck sheep to a ‘hospital’ paddock allows closer monitoring of recovery and reduces the risk to the rest of the mob.

5. Cull adult ewes that are repeatedly struck (crutch or body) from the breeding program in aim of improving overall flystrike resistance in a flock.

The flyboss website (http://www.flyboss.com.au) contains a vast amount of information that will assist with the selection and application of treatment products.

For further information or concerns with regard to flystrike treatment contact your local district veterinarian.

How to Manage Grass seeds?
adopted from the Meat & Livestock Friday feedback

There are no easy answers to grass seed control, but the good news for producers is there are grass seed management options available to suit all production systems.

If seed has set and there are no seed-free paddocks, short-term options include:

Feedlotting
Relocate stock out of seedy paddocks to avoid grass seed contamination.

Early turn-off
Only if sheep are seed-free (don’t make seeds someone else’s problem).
Strategic grazing

This enables priority stock, such as lambs, to graze low-risk paddocks.

Effective strategies to employ a couple of months before seed set include:

**Spray topping**

If paddocks with problem annual grasses are identified early in the season, graze heavily over spring and remove stock two to three weeks before grass maturity (for uniform grass seed heads). Apply a non-selective herbicide between head emergence and the milky doughy stage (depending on chemical used) to prevent seed set.

**Spray grazing**

Spray broadleaf weeds when they are 6-8 weeks old with a low rate/sub-lethal dose of a selective herbicide. Plants wilt, increasing sugar levels and palatability. After 7-10 days, graze the paddock at 4-5 times the normal stocking rate. Avoid grazing pasture below 3 cm to prevent damage to desirable plants. This technique is most effective in the two weeks after spraying.

**Premature shearing**

Shear before seed set to reduce grass seed contamination of wool. This is also a good long-term option for producers who don’t wish to use chemicals (or have resistance issues), or if all paddocks have a seed risk.

**Winter cleaning**

To manage pastures badly infested with silver grass, and to a lesser extent barley and brome grass, spray before they set.

**Mechanical control**

Harrowing or slashing long pastures reduces the likelihood of grass seeds entering the eyes of sheep, and works well in conjunction with early shearing.

Producers can also implement longer-term options, such as:

Fodder crops and improved pastures

Replace problem grasses with more productive and nutritious feed. Grazing management and soil fertility are important to maintain a competitive, improved pasture that will keep weed invasion to a minimum. Options include oats or a combination of oats and vetch, barley and vetch, and pulses (peas, beans and vetch).

**Genetics**

Selective breeding enables lambs to reach target weights early, so they can be sold before the main grass seed period.

**More information**

Grass seeds resources: Winning against seeds booklet and video tutorials available from the Meat & Livestock Australia website.

Your agronomist can provide information about appropriate herbicides to use in spray topping and winter cleaning.

A trial lamb kill can test the effectiveness of grass seed management. This involves processing small lines (20–30 head) of representative lambs to predetermine the likelihood of seed infestation. Producers can use this feedback about grass seed incidence to make better on-farm grass seed management decisions. This strategy has been promoted in South Australia for many years, but the distance to processors in other states can make trial kills unviable.

**With wet and warmth there will be worms!**

**by District Veterinarian Tim Biffin**

Given the current climate across the Riverina, parasite management should be in focus for all livestock producers. Internal parasites are able to thrive when there is short prolific ground cover (to protect from UV radiation), high moisture/humidity (to protect from desiccation) and mild-warmer weather (to increase metabolism).
What should I be doing?

As a general piece of advice you should know when your sheep need drenching. This should not be based on pub talk or blind assumptions, but rather, a faecal egg count (FEC) as explained in the caption of image 5. Although there are some inconsistencies with older sheep, the results from a FEC will give a fair indication of the current worm burden, from which you can make an informed decision of whether to drench or not.

For FEC testing all pots should be filled to the top with faeces from 10 individuals representative of the mob.

These can be collected from the ground in the yards or the paddock after mustering the mob to a corner and holding them there for approximately 15 min.

What could I be doing?

Some producers monitor flocks with FECs and yet do not need to drench very frequently, this is due to some other sound parasite management practices such as:

- preparing low worm-risk pastures (understanding contamination and larval survival on pasture)
- grazing management (including rotational grazing)
- sound nutritional management
- breeding
- drench management (including effective drenching and drench resistance testing).

Further information on all of these is available via http://www.wormboss.com.au/ This is an extremely valuable resource for producers that should be on everyone’s ‘favourites list’.

Any handy tips?

- Post drenching, leave sheep in the yards with a bale of hay for 24 hours. This will allow any remaining viable eggs to be passed onto the yards and not onto the new pasture.
- >90% of infective larvae in pasture will be no greater the 5 cm from the ground. Therefore, sheep that are being allowed to heavily graze pasture will have a higher rate of re-infestation.
- Spelling a pasture for two months over summer will reduce infective larvae on that pasture by approximately 90%.
- If you have been using the same drench year-in and year-out, you should check that it is actually still effective (that is actually killing worms), it is best to call your veterinary advisor to discuss this further.
- If you are using scours and ill-thrift as a cue to start drenching you have left it way too late! In fact, barber’s pole worm (BPW) will only very rarely be associated with scours, even when there are significant mortalities in the mob.
Have you checked your rams before joining?
by District Veterinarian Kristy Stone

For those of you approaching joining now is the time to check your rams. Ideally this examination should be conducted eight weeks before joining – this will give you time to ensure rams requiring treatments have had time to recover or replacement rams may be purchased if needed. Healthy rams are crucial for maximizing conception rates and achieving tight joining/lambing periods.

There are five things you should be checking:

Body condition
Rams in poor body condition may be suffering from poor nutrition, internal parasites, chronic disease or old age. Depending on the issue, the decision may be made to treat/manage the ram or cull.

Testicles
Palpate the testicles (including the epididymis) to identify any abnormalities such as lumps or variations in size or texture. Normal testicles should have no lumps and be firm (but not hard) and uniform in size. If you are unsure about how to palpate or concerned about lumps you have found, you should seek a veterinarian’s advice or assistance.

Feet/legs
Lameness will affect a ram’s ability to get around and serve ewes during the joining period. Visualise the ram walking to identify any lameness. Closely inspect the feet for signs of abscess or footrot and examine the legs, especially joints for swelling.

Teeth
Check the teeth, especially in older rams. Consider culling any rams with a broken mouth as they may be less capable of maintaining weight and achieving maximum performance during joining.

Penis
Examining a ram’s penis for cuts and ulcers can be done in a tipped ram, understandably this may not always be practical. At a minimum, the prepuce should be inspected and the penis palpated through the prepuce to identify any obvious swellings or lumps.

If buying new rams, it is highly recommended that the rams are purchased from an ovine brucellosis accredited flock and a sheep health statement is requested from the seller.

Once the new rams arrive, a quarantine drench with a combination product should be given and rams should be kept isolated for as long as possible to monitor them for signs of lice or footrot.

Announcements

Travelling stock routes fully accessible after the big wet
Riverina Local Land Services travelling stock routes (TSRs) will resume full operation following the severe flooding across the region and will offer a 25% reduction on grazing permit fees for stock, along with an increase in the mob size allowed.

Landholders with stock that adjoin TSRs, where fuel loads are deemed high, can receive free grazing for up to 14 days to assist with management of fire risks.

Landholders are able to install firebreaks alongside TSRs providing they obtain advice and approval from their local TSR Ranger.

If landholders are interested in grazing stock on TSRs they should contact their nearest Riverina
Local Land Services office or phone 1300 795 299.

A range of permits are available to meet various customer needs.

Additional information on permits types and fees is available at www.lls.nsw.gov.au/riverina.

Riverina Local Land Services
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