Animal Health Update

Q-Fever
by District Veterinarian Rahul Shankar

What is Q-fever?
‘Query’ fever or Q-fever is a notifiable bacterial infection caused by the organism *Coxiella burnetii*. It is passed on from almost any animal including cattle, sheep, goats and kangaroos.

The organism is known to survive for prolonged periods of time in the environment and can be easily spread by dust, hay and other small particles. Infected dust particles can settle on wool and hides, and can easily spread after being disturbed by movement of wind.

What are the symptoms?
Early symptoms resemble the flu: fever, sweating, body ache and pains. If caught early enough, the disease can be treated with appropriate antibiotics prescribed for your local GP.

Unlike the flu, Q-fever can leave a percentage of sufferers who do not recover with long-term chronic fatigue and a host of other issues including endocarditis (infection of the heart valves).

Just under 500 Australians a year are diagnosed with the disease and recent research has revealed northern New South Wales towns like Guyra and Gunnedah, are also hotspots, with as much as 22 per cent of the population showing exposure to the disease.

My family has lived on the land all their lives, should we be concerned about Q-fever?
YES. Exposure to the organism may not have occurred, and your body may not have the required antibodies to fend off the infection should the need arise. Farmers and rural workers are the most affected group of persons.

How can I check my Q-fever status?
Speak to your local GP about undergoing a Q-fever screening test. This involves a skin and blood test.

Should you require it, you will be administered a vaccine. Australia is the only registered country in the world to offer a vaccine for this disease.

As we approach what is predicted to be a dry and hot summer it is important to monitor your Q-fever status. It is equally important to spread the message of Q-fever screening across rural NSW and Australia.

Neonatal lamb mortalities
by District Veterinarian Gabrielle Morrice

Deaths of new born lambs at lambing or within about a week of age are considered by a recently released MLA report¹ to be the highest production cost ($441.6M) Australia-wide for sheep producers.

Industry recommends that losses should not exceed 10% for singles and 20% for twins www.lifetimewool.com. In practice however, losses are often higher than this.

There are many factors involved in reducing the number of neonatal deaths. The major ones determined by studies and surveys across Australia include:

1 Priority list of endemic diseases for the red meat industries. MLA, 20 March, 2015

www.riverina.lls.nsw.gov.au
optimising ewe nutrition during pregnancy to ensure lambs are born at optimal weights and that ewe losses are minimized. It is recommended that single-bearing ewes should have a body condition score (BCS) of between 2 and 4 at lambing (NB fatter than a 4 can contribute to dystocias) and that twin-bearing ewes have a BCS of greater than 2.5;

- genotypes (different flocks appear to do better than others). The effect of different approaches will vary between flocks and may be related to the ewes’ genetics as well as the timing of lambing;

- flock health is important in minimising losses. Areas to consider include drenching programs, and vaccination. Some geographic areas may need to consider supplementing for trace element deficiencies such as iodine or selenium;

- Other health factors such as infectious abortion (e.g. Campylobacter) and mastitis will also contribute to neonatal mortalities;

- farm planning to improve pastures and shelters. If the weather is likely to be poor during lambing, shelter is necessary. Predator control is also important.

Intensive supervision of the lambing flock is considered to be the optimum intervention.

This must be balanced by an opposing imperative to minimize disruption to the ewes.

At a minimum, most producers will inspect sheep for lambing problems once daily.

Further information and diagnosis of deaths in your lambs can be provided by contacting your Local Land Services District Veterinarian.

Grass tetany by District Veterinarian Emily Stearman

The current seasonal conditions have been highly conducive to cases of grass tetany right across the Riverina.

Risk factors for low blood magnesium:

- cattle under stress – particularly lactating cows (higher requirement for magnesium)

- breed predisposition – Angus, Murray Grey, Shorthorn’s more susceptible

- warming day/night temps - >8°C night temperatures following four or more days of <7°C night temperatures when cattle are grazing grass or cereals

- rapidly growing short grass or cereals on high potassium soils

Magnesium is required for normal muscle function and is important in many other metabolic processes. Clinically low magnesium levels occur when a combination of the above factors exists.

If grass tetany is diagnosed on a property the risk of recurrence in subsequent years is high. However it is easily managed by supplementing the diet with magnesium, namely Causmag.

At this time of year many people are feeding cereal hays; Causmag can be applied directly onto the hay, on a daily basis.

Various commercial and home mixed licks are also beneficial, however licks containing greater than 30% Causmag are quite bitter and animals will avoid them.

It is common practice to mix lime and salt with Caumag for a dry lick, adding molasses to create a wet lick.

If you are experiencing sudden deaths or are concerned about your herd, contact your local district vet for specific advice.
Bloat by District Veterinarian Matt O’Dwyer

We have received some phone calls recently concerning cattle with swollen left sides. This will also occur in sheep, though more rarely. This time of year the cause of the swelling in the left flank is usually from pasture bloat.

Bloat occurs when gas is trapped in the rumen. Bloat occurs more often at this time of year because of the rapidly growing young fresh grasses, such as rapidly growing rye grass, and legumes such as clovers, medic and Lucerne. This type of bloat is called pasture bloat.

Finely ground grain will also cause bloat and this is called feedlot bloat. Bloat becomes severe when the animals are unable to release the gasses from the rumen (eructation) because of an accumulation of froth locking gasses in the rumen.

Feed low in fibre and high in protein, soluble sugar and water content leads to an increase in froth and gas build up.

Bloat is a major cause of sudden death in cattle. Bloat in cattle and sheep often occurs with pulpy kidney, so it is recommended to vaccinate against clostridial disease (5-in-1, 7 in 1 or even the new TASVAX 8-in-1) before putting stock out onto fresh lush pasture.

When cattle are moved onto bloat-producing pastures they will commonly bloat within an hour or two.

Prevention includes filling the animal with hay each day before grazing, applying pasture oils, using rumen capsules, drenching the rumen directly with oil, applying anti-bloat products to the flank or water troughs, using anti-bloat licks and blocks and also considering use of fermentation modifiers such as monensin.

Treatment of bloat in severely affected animals needs rapid relief. Producers could try administering vegetable oil (250–500 mL) or paraffin oil (100–200 mL) via a tube or drench gun into the mouth when swelling is noticed. However if the animal is in distress then call for private veterinary assistance immediately.

The financial benefit of Biosecurity (Sourced from ABARES)

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) today released a new report demonstrating the real value of Australia’s world-class biosecurity system at up to $17,500 a year for the average farmer.

ABARES Executive Director Karen Schneider said that managing biosecurity was critical to maintaining the productivity of Australia’s agricultural sector by supporting business as usual operating conditions for farmers.

“Freedom from many of the world’s major pests and diseases provides agricultural industries with a significant trade advantage and is important for maintaining access to valuable export markets,” Ms Schneider said.

“This study estimates the value of Australia’s biosecurity system ‘at the farmgate’, using a case study approach.”

Just how much money the system saves farmers was analysed in the value of Australia’s biosecurity system at the farm gate: an analysis of avoided trade and on-farm impacts.

The report considers the effect on farm enterprise profits of an outbreak of six potentially significant biosecurity threats to Australian agriculture, including foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), Mexican feather grass, citrus greening, highly pathogenic avian influenza and Karnal bunt.

Ms Schneider said that broadacre farms typically undertake a range of cropping and livestock activities, and farm profits may be affected by several pests and diseases.

“Without our current biosecurity system in place, the profits of broadacre farms would be $12,000 to $17,500 less because of the higher risk of FMD, Mexican feather grass and Karnal bunt outbreaks,” Ms Schneider said.
What’s more, the Australian biosecurity system directly supports higher land values because the profits generated by broadacre farms are higher than they would have been without the system in place.

“Annual profits of pig enterprises would be 15 per cent lower because of the higher risk of an FMD incursion.

“Annual profits of beef, dairy and sheep enterprises would be 8 to 12 per cent lower, while annual profits of cropping enterprises would be 7 per cent lower because of a higher risk of a Karnal bunt incursion.

“Annual profits of chicken enterprise would be 3 per cent lower and the annual profits of egg enterprises would be 2 per cent lower because of a higher risk of highly pathogenic avian influenza.”

Ms Schneider said these figures were likely to be conservative as they were based only on top-level threats and diseases affecting farming.

Other Announcements

Volunteers Needed

A study being conducted by Charles Sturt University entitled “Understanding your management practices and the impact on animal health” is looking for 10-12 sheep farmers that have greater than 500 head of sheep to undertake a 1 hour interview on animal practices.

Volunteers will be given a $100 gift voucher in return for their valuable time.

Enquiries can be directed to:

Mr Jake Fountain 0409 475 275 or fountain61@hotmail.com or

Dr Marta Hernandez-Jover 6933 2086 or mherandez-jover@csu.edu.au

Graham Centre Sheep Forum a success

117 people attended the recent Graham Centre sheep forum at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga. The feedback from the day was overwhelmingly positive and producers took a lot from the day. If you were unable to attend but would like to view any of the presentations from the day, you can access them here:

http://www.csu.edu.au/research/grahamcentre/events/sheep-forum

Riverina Local Land Services

District Veterinarians

Please note new office numbers

Wagga Wagga
Tim Biffin and Emily Stearman
6923 0900

Young
Elizabeth Braddon and Rahul Shankar
6381 4700

Gundagai
Vets at Young/Wagga to assist in the interim
6940 6900

Griffith/Hay
Matt O’Dwyer
6960 1300 (Griffith) 6993 1403 (Hay)

Narrandera
Gabrielle Morrice
6958 1800

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