Animal Health Update

But I only have a few head of stock...

By Regional Veterinarian, Eliz Braddon

It does not matter if you have one sheep or cow or 100 of them, the same rules apply in NSW!

Since September 2012, there has been new legislation in NSW that requires all land where stock is held to have a Property Identification Code (PIC). That includes one cow, one sheep, one horse or donkey, one camelid (ie alpaca, llama) or 100 or more poultry. This is a requirement to improve our traceability of stock in the event that we have to trace livestock movements. Remember horse flu? Tracking movements of horses was very difficult at times during the outbreak but the new legislation with the expansion of PICs enables more efficient traceability.

So if you have a few “lawn mowers” or just trade a couple of head of cattle every few years that you have hand raised, you still need a PIC. And when you go to sell them, you will also need a National Vendor Declaration form.

Here is a simple check list of what bookwork you need to keep stock these days:

- **Property Identification Code (PIC)** – obtained from your Local Land Services office or online at www.riverina.lls.nsw.gov.au/livestock/pics.
- **National Vendor Declaration Book (NVD)** – if you intend to sell that stock at saleyards, abattoir or even privately. AusMeat Pty Ltd provides these books for sheep, cattle and goats. Australian Pork Limited has them for pigs. You will need to know your PIC before you register for a NVD book.
- **NLIS database account** – if you intend to have sheep, goats or cattle. You may also need a NLIS database account to monitor and register the movements of your stock. This particularly applies if you move them around from property to property or buy stock privately. More information on the database can be found at www.nlis.mla.com.au or www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/nlis.
- **NLIS tags** – electronic ear tags or rumen boluses for cattle; visual plastic tags for sheep and goats. These tags have the property PIC stamped on them and must be in place before any animals leave their property of birth.
- **Record livestock movements** – when sheep/goats/cattle move from one property to another that movement must be recorded on the NLIS database. If you use a saleyard or direct to an abattoir, they will do it for you.

If you move stock privately, then it is the responsibility of the buyer to ensure that movement has been recorded on the NLIS database.

It is best to organise the PIC well before you purchase any stock as you will need to be able to record your stock against this PIC when you buy. And you need to organise the NVDs well before you sell if you want to avoid angry agents, price penalties due to reduced bidding, and general frustration!

If you need assistance in understanding any of these requirements, please contact your local Riverina Local Land Services office.

Redgut: a disease, consequence to excellent production

By District Veterinarian, Timothy Biffin

Over the last few months, many properties throughout the Riverina have been producing some excellent Lucerne paddocks for grazing livestock. Although it may seem counter-intuitive, without taking some
precautions, grazing these pastures may cause significant mortalities in weaner-sheep mobs.

Redgut is predominantly a sudden death disease of weaner sheep. It is caused by a pure diet of highly digestible forage that is high in protein and low in structural carbohydrates, the no.1 example being lush, fast growing Lucerne (few cases have also been reported with lush clover or ryegrass pastures). As Lucerne allows for greater feed intakes (and superior growth rates), less time is spent ruminating or resting. Feed is moved more rapidly through the gut and hindgut fermentation is favored. This means that the hindgut (large intestines) increases in size in comparison to the foregut (stomachs). As the size discrepancy progresses the positioning of organs within the abdomen begin to shift. Eventually, the intestine will suddenly twist on themselves to fit the new situation. This twisting of the intestines carries a fatal outcome; as the gut loops twist they occlude their own blood supply. So effectively there is a tourniquet on the intestines. Without effective blood supply the tissue starts to die off and the animal will go into shock and rapidly die (within 3-6 hours).

To set the scene of typical Redgut case: you may have a mob of vaccinated weaner lambs in good body conditions, that have been having excellent weight gains while grazing a lush Lucerne paddock over the last 3-4 weeks. You go to check the waters and find 5 out of 100 lambs dead and 2 more down with painful distended abdomens. After a veterinary investigation, a diagnosis of Redgut may be made – usually from necropsy of a freshly dead animal (<4hrs post mortem).

Although Redgut is a fatal disease and there is currently no treatment available, prevention is simple and effective; pure, lush Lucerne pastures should be supplemented with some form of roughage, especially when it is grazed by weaner lambs. Livestock will still benefit from the highly digestible pasture, and the roughage will allow the animals keep a safe balance of foregut: hindgut fermentation.

With the rainfall we are having at the moment, we could see increased worm activity in about three to four weeks.

Footrot is not eradicated
by District Veterinarian, Amy Shergold

We are so proud of the very successful footrot eradication program run in the 80s and 90s, which earned NSW the formidable ‘Protected Area’ status in 2009. This means that less than 1% of properties in NSW are affected with virulent footrot. The low prevalence has led some to believe that virulent footrot is eradicated in NSW, which unfortunately is not the case. We still see affected flocks, particularly where sheep have been bought-in from higher prevalence areas.

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

In the Riverina, spring is conducive to the expression and spread of footrot. As last autumn was wet and mild, we diagnosed a few new cases then too. Moving or selling sheep into higher rainfall areas can also uncover previously undiagnosed footrot.

If you have lame sheep, with irritation between their claws, get your District Veterinarian out to have a look at them before you start any treatments such as footbathing. It can be very difficult to distinguish virulent footrot from the milder strains of benign footrot or ‘scald’. It commonly involves examination of 100 or more sheep and laboratory tests.

Thorough inspections of lame sheep are vitally important. They allow 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.
Riverina Sheep Biosecurity Group

Introduction

The aim of the Riverina Biosecurity Group is for the sheep industry to work together to maintain a low prevalence of Ovine Johnes Disease (OJD), footrot and ovine Brucellosis (OB) so that sheep from the area will be productive with a good reputation for health and access to markets in all other parts of Australia.

There is no OJD that we know of in the western Riverina. This is due to the relatively few movements of sheep from areas where OJD is common because the sheep from those areas do not really suit the Riverina. As well as OJD there is very little footrot or OB in the area.

Other sheep biosecurity groups have been formed with similar aims and there has been mutual recognition between the Riverina group and groups in all of South Australia and all of Queensland as well as the Western Division of NSW, New England and Central Western NSW and the Victorian Mallee.

Sheep from each of those groups will be eligible to enter any other group.

How was it established?

The group was established following discussions with the sheep industry and a vote by sheep producers.

A committee of concerned sheep producers has been formed to oversee the group.

What is involved?

The key components of the group are those of biosecurity:

- Control or eradication of diseases present in sheep flocks
- Care with sheep movements to reduce the risk of spread of infection
- Monitoring and surveillance to detect new infections

The main tool to reduce the risk of disease moving into the area is the national Sheep Health Statement (SHS) and it is a requirement of the group that no sheep are bought, agisted or accepted as a gift unless they are accompanied by a completed SHS.

The SHS can be printed from a file which is available on the national OJD information website www.ojd.com.au.

The SHS must state that the sheep are:

- From a flock free from virulent footrot
- Any rams are from an OB accredited free flock (or a flock tested negative for OB within the past 30 days)
- From another, equivalent, sheep biosecurity group
- Terminal lambs (no more than 50% merino and which will be slaughtered before they cut any permanent incisors
- From a SheepMAP (MN1, MN2, MN3 or MNV) flock
- From a flock tested negative for OJD (PFC 350 Abattoir 500) within the past 2 years

Gudair vaccination alone will not make sheep eligible to enter the area.

Sheep from eligible flocks are still eligible to come into the biosecurity area if they have moved:

- To a show or sale outside a biosecurity area where appropriate precautions have been taken against the spread of OJD
- To a saleyard outside a biosecurity area where they do not have access to any feed on the ground and are there for less than 72 hours

Figure 1 Map Riverina Sheep Biosecurity Area

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Riverina Local Land Services
District Verteinarians

Wagga Wagga
Tim Biffin
6923 0900

Young
Elizabeth Braddon and Rahul Shankar
6382 1255

Gundagai
Amy Shergold
6944 1588

Narrandera
Gabrielle Morrice
6959 2322

Riverina Local Land Services
1300 795 299
www.riverina.lls.nsw.gov.au