Follow the label
by District Veterinarian Gabrielle Morrice

A recent discussion in an online veterinary forum has highlighted the importance of following label instructions when using chemicals or medications on livestock.

A farmer had received a drug to treat his horse for colic that was labelled NOT FOR USE IN ANIMALS INTENDED FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION. Unfortunately, when his cow became lame he thought the drug might in some way be of benefit to the cow. After the treatment did not work, he called a vet.

The cow is now deemed unfit for human consumption, with no Australian withholding period, meaning it should never be used for meat. If sold, and the residues are detected, then the owner may face legal action, as well as placing our export industries at risk. To further complicate matters, the cow was pregnant and had a calf at foot.

The main take-home message of all chemical user training is to “follow the label”. The same is true of all medications and farm chemicals. This is to protect our industries, as well as the people using the chemicals/medicines and their livestock.

Australia’s much-touted Clean and Green image is worth big money to agricultural industry, and we all play a part in maintaining it.

Grass seeds, a big problem for our sheep
by District Veterinarian Tim Biffin

It is the time of year for grass seed damage, and the barley grass is starting to present a significant problem across the region.

I have also observed many of the other usual culprits starting to set seed: cork screw grass, wiregrass, and spear grass. Moving further through spring, producers need to be aware of the potential problems and should have a management plan in place – some producers may have already top sprayed pasture.

Given the right conditions grass seeds will cause huge losses. Young, inexperienced sheep are more likely to be affected through patches of damaging grass seeds. Once in woolled areas the seeds will persist and burrow into the skin causing extreme discomfort.

We have all experienced a few grass seeds in our socks so I am sure we can all understand why affected animals are reluctant to walk around and graze.

Further to this, seeds will embed between the toes causing lameness. These animals lose weight and become susceptible to infection. They may develop pink eye and blindness from direct abrasion and recently I have noticed an increased amount of pink eye in lambs through saleyards.

In regard to their commodities, vegetative matter within the wool clip and damage to the carcass and skin can result in significant penalties and reduced value.

Until the seed has dropped it’s best to avoid putting unshorn sheep in paddocks containing seed set barley grass, cork screw grass, and other difficult grasses.
Sometimes these paddocks cannot be avoided so slashing tracks through the paddocks will help sheep to avoid grass seed patches.

Running older sheep with naive younger sheep can help train young sheep to avoid grass seed areas.

Agistment is another option to consider. Consulting your pastoral advisor in regards to management strategies is always a wise choice.

If grass seeds already affect sheep the only thing you can do is shear. Antibiotics may help on the odd occasion if they have infection as a result of the grass seeds.

If you were planning to dip grass seed infested sheep for lice or flies, you may need to reconsider and use a back liner instead.

The skin damage from grass seeds will allow entry of bacteria into the body causing arthritis and other infection.

Alternatively allow about six weeks after shearing before you dip. The animals need to be put in a paddock with good fresh feed and a water source close by until they recover. This will allow them to graze without too much walking.

### Sheep foot abscesses
by District Veterinarian Matt O’Dwyer

There have been a few cases of foot abscesses over the last month. Foot Abscess is divided into two categories, one associated with the heel (heel abscess) and the other associated with the toe (toe abscess).

Foot abscess generally occurs during winter and spring after good rains while the paddocks are soaked and boggy. It is caused by bacteria infecting the toe or heel of the foot. Foot abscess is not to be confused with the notifiable disease Virulent Footrot.

A visit from a veterinarian is required to differentiate between footrot and foot abscess. Virulent footrot is associated with far greater animal welfare and economic impacts and there is compulsory eradication programs in infected flocks associated with this disease.

Heel abscess and toe abscess often occur in heavy sheep after damage to the foot from walking over muddy rocky areas or areas with a large amount of catheads.

Symptoms generally include swelling around the infected area and eventually bloody brown or green pus may burst out. Toe abscesses occur more often after a crack in the hoof in the front feet. Heel abscesses start between the skin of the two toes and then extends into the heels and is commonly associated with heavy adult/pregnant sheep.

Usually foot abscesses are associated with a single foot unlike footrot which is often associated with multiple feet.

In a foot abscess, the pus builds up over time and will burst out at the point of least resistance, often at the coronet. Sheep will become lame and will lose condition until the abscess bursts and the pressure is released.

Diagnosis is made after a veterinary examination of the feet of lame sheep and possible laboratory testing. Treatment and prevention options are important. Toe abscesses need hoof paring to provide drainage of the pus.

Heel abscesses can be more severe and infect deeper into the foot tissues and bony joint structures and can often require antibiotic treatments to prevent worsening of bone infection. The healing process starts once the abscess bursts.

Prevention is carried out by maintaining historical records of problem paddocks with rocks or heavy infestation of catheads areas and, where possible and practical, trying to keep previously infected heavy sheep out of these paddocks.

![Image 1: Burst foot abscess](image1.jpg)
Footrot by District Veterinarian Rahul Shankar

With the recent rain we have had throughout the region, biosecurity officers and district veterinarians have been following up on footrot traces at saleyards and from properties diagnosed with virulent footrot (VFR) where sheep have been moved from or to another destination.

As a reminder VFR is a notifiable disease in NSW under the Stock Diseases Act, 1923. As such there is a legal obligation on occupiers of land and stock, persons in charge of transporting stock, veterinarians and other persons consulted about stock to notify a Local Land Services inspector within 48 hours of first coming to knowledge of any diseased stock.

Footrot is a contagious bacterial disease of sheep and goats. Footrot is a debilitating disease with significant economic losses occurring to infected flocks. The primary clinical sign to look for when suspecting footrot is severe lameness in a mob or mobs.

Development of footrot depends on both infective and environmental conditions. The bacterial organism, *D. nodosus* must be established in order for footrot to develop. Footrot in sheep is dependent on three main environmental factors in order to facilitate its spread amongst a mob. These include: mean daily temperatures above 10C, adequate moisture, adequate pasture length or density in order to make feet susceptible to infection. **Footrot does not spread during hot and dry conditions.**

**What can you do to ensure that footrot stays off your property?**

- Always ask for a Sheep Health Statement and look at the information contained in Section B
- Quarantine any sheep that are brought on the property for a period of at least 7-10 days. Monitor the sheep for any lameness during this time.


Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) Quiz by District Veterinarian Rahul Shankar

A sheep and cattle producer has grown increasingly concerned as his mob of Hereford steers and Merino ewes are starting to display signs of licking and rubbing around the flanks and tails. He has also noticed some animals start to gnaw at their skin. This producer also has a small herd of back yard grower pigs and one sow; and has had a few deaths amongst them. He described the sow as dying of a violent fit. He also has several pigs coughing and sneezing and losing body condition. Also of interest his two working kelpies have also started to lick and rub at their tails. He has given both dogs a spot on treatment, but this does not appear to be helping him.

![Image 2: Sow undergoing a tetanic spasm with jaw chomping](Image2)

Which possible condition is the district vet most concerned about?

a) Aujesky's disease  
b) Rabies  
c) Nipah virus disease  
d) Leptospirosis  
e) Lice

The correct answer is a) **Aujesky’s disease (pseudo-rabies).**

**Aujesky’s disease is caused by a virus.** Pigs are the natural host of the disease, however the disease can spread to nearly all domesticated and wild animals. It does not affect humans. It is usually transmitted via the respiratory pathway between pigs. Mortality rates are up to 100% in piglets less than a week old, and decreases as the age of the animal increases.
The most significant risk of entry of Aujeszky’s disease into Australia is through illegal entry — via passengers on ships or aircraft, or via post — of genetic material and infected pig products that are swill-fed to domestic pigs or accessed by feral pigs and rodents. (Swill feeding is illegal in Australia.) There is a risk from garbage discarded by fishing vessels or yachts. Aujeszky’s disease has the potential to become established in the feral pig population, especially in remote and rural regions of Australia. Amplification and regional spread could then occur via fomites, live pigs and semen. Small commercial piggeries would be most at risk.

One of the difficulties facing Australia in an Aujeszky’s disease outbreak is how fast will we recognise the disease. This means that everyone from the paddock (producers, agents, abattoir workers) to the top of government (private vets, district vets, veterinary laboratories, State and Federal veterinary officers) have to be aware of their role in that diagnosis. For those of us at the ground level, we need to be able to recognise the signs as unusual and then seek the appropriate help.

As a producer, what would you do if these were your sheep, cattle, pigs or dogs?

Your answer should be to call a vet. This could be your local private vet or your local district vet. These are the people equipped to get a speedy diagnosis and also assist in containing the disease. You could also call the Exotic Disease Hotline 1800 675 888.

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