Animal Health Update

Lead toxicity and residues by District Veterinarian Gabe Morrice

At any one time in NSW, there will be between 250 and 400 cattle detained as a result of lead residues.

Lead causes toxicity and residues in cattle due to their affinity for the lead salts accumulating on old batteries and natural curiosity that leads them to lick or chew lead-containing old painted surfaces and sump oils, oil filters, linoleum and other lead containing sources.

Sheep and goats are equally susceptible, but appear less likely to eat lead-containing materials.

Lead causes deaths in exposed cattle, along with signs that can include depression, head-pressing, staggering, blindness and jaw-gnashing. This is due to the impact the lead has on the animal’s central nervous system, in particular the brain.

If you detect any of these, or other, nervous signs in your livestock, it is important to get it investigated by a veterinarian to determine the cause.

Treatments are available for affected animals, but as with most toxins, prevention is easier than cure.

As lead is also toxic to humans, lead affected animals cannot be allowed to enter the food chain. Affected animals are detained on-property until the lead can be removed from their system.

If not detected prior to leaving the property, the lead affected animals can be detected at the abattoir by the National Residue Survey monitoring.

Do your bit to help prevent lead residues. Some suggested steps to prevent access to lead include:

- Check around old buildings and sheds for possible lead sources including old batteries (including casings), sump oil or old painted items including vehicles and furniture, paint tins. Remove them where possible.
- Fence off old tip sites on properties to eliminate livestock access.
- If stock graze with an easement for water pipe, electricity or gas, check with the relevant authority that there is no lead risk associated with the installation.

Image 1 - Tip site filled with potential lead batteries

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Avoiding calf scours in beef enterprises
by District Veterinarian Tim Biffin

Scours in beef calves are most common within the first six weeks of life. If left unmanaged, mortalities can be significant; up to 10% of calf deaths post birthing.

Further to this, the treatment of scours is time consuming, difficult and often unrewarding. Efforts should focus on prevention.

This disease is caused by an interaction between the environment, calf health and presence of the agent (pathogen). Meaning that presence of the agent alone is often not enough to cause disease, poor environmental conditions and compromised calf health is also required. Common agents of concern are bacterial (e.g. Salmonella, E. coli), viral (e.g. rotavirus, coronavirus) or protozoal (e.g. coccidian, cryptosporidia).

Following are some basic measures to minimize scours in your beef calves:

Minimize contact with potential sources of infection

- Target a limited joining (eg 60 days).
- Identify calving and nursery paddocks 12 months in advance.
- Minimize exposure of newborns to infection sources.
- Avoid manure build up.
- You should have <5% increase in dry cow numbers since pregnancy testing.

Maximize colostrum intake

- Monitor cow Body Condition Score (BCS), heifer live weight, sire selection and heifer and twin calvings as difficult birthing (dystocia) is the most common cause of poor colostrum intake.
- Pregnant cows can be vaccinated to pass immunity onto their calves through colostrum.

Promote calf welfare and nutrition

- Calving and nursing areas require multiple shelter areas, proximate water (<300m), and should be dry and draught-free.
- Monitor and maintain cow BCS, monitor and match feed provisions with feed requirements.
- Be aware of trace mineral requirements.
- The number of calves abandoned and not suckling within six hours of birth should not exceed 2%. If it does, this indicates a management problem.

Avoid introduction of new calf scour pathogens

- Do not introduce any animals into calving herds or herds with calves less than six weeks of age.
- Isolate animals that have started scouring until over six weeks of age.
- Consider general biosecurity principles – water run-off from other paddocks, colostrum from other farms etc.

Motivated producers initiate lice control group in Young
by District Veterinarian Rahul Shankar

Lice, a non-notifiable disease in NSW, continue to plague producers throughout the state. As a result, a group of motivated producers in the Young have banded together to try and bring the lice problem under control.

In consultation with Riverina Local Land Services, two information sessions have been held with approximately 25-30 producers attending each meeting.

Emphasis at those meetings has been placed around the management practices required to keep lice out of properties.

In addition, information was provided in regards to the proper chemical class and application method required to best combat this ever growing problem.
Approximately 50 properties are included as part of the two year voluntary program. The group kicked off in August, 2015 and has thus far had a positive uptake by members of the community. Twenty-five properties have undertaken cage immersion or plunge dipping of all of their sheep on their properties.

It is hoped that further producers will also join the program and heed the information being delivered via mail outs, in person and at the six monthly information sessions.

Watch this space for updates as to how the group progresses further on in the year and contact your local office should producers in your area want to start a similar initiative.

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Image 2: Lice Mapping for Young