

Sheep Farmer Newsletter October 2014

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Practice News

Well after a pretty soggy end to the winter, spring has turned out to be one of the better ones. Some lambs would have been 3 - 4 weeks old before they encountered any rain and even then it wasn't much. Hopefully, overall lamb survival is better than usual for you all.

Staff wise with the workload we are under a bit of pressure and are trying to obtain another vet (or two). However, that can be easier said than done sometimes. Steven Butler arrived back from overseas at the beginning of September so that has helped.

On the Balclutha Clinic redevelopment front, there is some progress. Alterations to the western end of the bulk shed to create a large animal vet gear store are

complete. The construction of garages and carports on a retained bank out the back was held up because of the wet ground conditions over winter, but that is getting underway now.

The above project is actually a minor "side issue" really. The bigger part is actually a redevelopment of the main clinic building itself. This is needed for two basic reasons:

- We are bursting at the seams and need more space. At the time of the last redevelopment in the mid 90's we had 5 vets in Balclutha!
- It is approaching 20 years since the last refurbishment and parts of the building are starting to look a bit tired.

This part of the project got the go ahead at the board meeting in September. It is really a pretty major development with all the planning, design and consent estimated to take until April next year and two stages of construction (one following the other) scheduled to start in May '15 and finish May '16. In other words, construction is estimated to take 12 months. There will be massive inconvenience and dislocation as we somehow have to keep operating while all this is going on. Never mind - short term pain for long term gain!

Recent Animal Health Problems

1. Salmonella Brandenburg in Ewes – As has become the norm, we had quite a few cases of abortion and illness/deaths due to this. At the time of the last newsletter in August (written towards the end of July), we had just had the one case. This year the Greenfield - Waitahuna West area seemed to be in the thick of it, plus we had cases from the Catlins and West Otago. It is a bit early yet to say how numbers affected compared to last year, possibly a few more.

2. Stock Health on Swedes – We have had a few cases in cattle and sheep of problems occurring on the so called HT swedes. More on this later in the newsletter.

3. Lamb Navel/Oral Infections – In wet weather type lambings with lots of mud etc. you often get more navel infections resulting in arthritis (swollen joint(s) and lameness); liver and lung abscesses (these are usually found dead in the paddock after a short illness from 1 – 6 weeks of age); and watery mouth - an oral infection from 1 - 3 days of age. What is often not appreciated is that these problems can often be just as common in weather like we have had this year - minimal rain and some dust. The ground/grass from a bacteriological point of view is still rather contaminated in these drier conditions.

The cleanest environment from this aspect is where there is the occasional shower just to "wash" the grass. Not that you can really do anything about this but it does explain why, in what appears to be ideal lambing weather, you can still get some of these problems.

Reminders

1. Tailing. In recent years there has been the odd horror story from South Otago and Southland of lamb injuries and deaths following tailing. Investigation has revealed that in virtually all cases the fault has been from the occasional 'rogue' staff member employed by some tailing contractors whose work practices are sloppy, if not downright negligent. You need to try and keep a bit of oversight of what goes on at tailing as this sort of thing can cost you a lot of money.

A reminder that tail length is on the list of things "Mrs Overseas Housewife" is supposedly concerned about. While "her" reasons for this have nothing much to do with fact or science there are however good reasons not to cut tails off too short. These include:

- Really short tails mean lambs are more prone to ascending spinal canal infections which often result in hind leg paralysis.
- There is definite evidence of an increase in the incidence of rectal prolapse in very short tailed lambs.
- It also means they are likely to have dirtier hind ends through not being able to lift their tail stump properly out of the way when having a poo due to muscle/tendon damage at the base of the stump.
- There is less tissue to cut through and therefore less pain if tails are taken off slightly longer.

The ideal length is one where the tail stump covers the vulva in ewe lambs (and the equivalent length in ram lambs), which roughly corresponds to the bottom of the V where pink skin meets wool or where the two folds that come down either side of the tail from the back end merge into the tail. Apparently where these folds (called caudal folds) merge onto the tail is more consistent than where pink skin meets wool so maybe use that as your guide when tailing.

It is entirely possible that if taking off tails really short continues, then some turkey in Wellington will draft some possibly rather ridiculous regulations, so a bit of voluntary co-operation at this stage to simply slightly lengthen the tail stump could go a long way to ensuring common sense wins the day!

2. Scabby Mouth Vaccination. Just a reminder to check for takes 8 - 10 days post vaccination. There should be a raised angry looking scab along the scratch line. I have some photos of different takes on my computer if anyone isn't sure exactly what constitutes a good take. Don't succumb to the temptation to vaccinate by punching a hole in the ear with the applicator prongs - if you have a problem there will be no comeback. Make sure tailing contractors do what they are told, not the other way around.

3. Long Acting B12 Products. With Prolapan no longer on the market SmartshotB12 is the only product in this category now. If you haven't used these long acting products and find yourself repeatedly giving conventional B12 injections (Prolaject) then you should perhaps consider this option - read on.

There are two SmartshotB12 products - one plain and one selenised. These cost 57 and 65 cents respectively for a ½ml dose which will last 3 - 4 months. A 1ml dose will last 8 months but does increase the cost as those earlier lambs which go to the works have "unused" Smartshot sitting in them. One way around this would be to give all lambs a ½ml dose at tailing, and then repeat the dose 3 - 4 months later in the ewe lambs and any later works lambs. This avoids wasting money on lambs that are going to be off to the works by somewhere round the end of January. There is also the option of a dose somewhere in between - a ¾ml dose at tailing for example. Contact the clinic for more info.

4. Lamb Drenching at Tailing. Unless, for say weather reasons, tailing is quite delayed and lambs are 6 - 8 weeks old, giving lambs a worm drench at tailing is a waste of time and money. Any worm burden they have at tailing is so small that it will not make any significant difference to the timing and/or need for a pre-worming drench.

Anthelmintics for Deer

As I have been saying for some time, the deer industry is in a precarious state as far as anthelmintic effectiveness goes. Unlike in sheep and cattle we can't use faecal egg counts as a basis for decisions on drench effectiveness - slaughter studies are needed. Because these are expensive and by their nature somewhat terminal for the trial subjects, virtually none had been done, hence we have been lacking solid information on exactly how effective many of the anthelmintics are in deer. In the last couple of years, thanks to some slaughter studies done down in Southland, we now have a bit more information on which to base our recommendations.

A triple combination has been proven to be the way forward. Unfortunately the proportions required in the ideal triple for deer don't occur in any of the commercially available products and hence we need to make our own "cocktail" taking into account the following factors:

- The 'mectin' family is best given by injection - oral formulations have been shown to be less effective where resistance is present. **Under no circumstances should a pour-on ever be used.**
- The sheep/cattle label dose rate for the BZ (white) drenches is inadequate - the slaughter studies show it needs to be 3, even 4, times higher.

- Levamisole (clear) drench has some action against Ostertagia type worms (but none against lungworm). For toxicity reasons doses shouldn't exceed more than twice the sheep/cattle dose rate.

The "cocktail" that best fits the above requirements is:

- An injection of Cydectin, Exodus or Dectomax at the usual cattle dose rate of 1ml/50kg.
- **Plus** given at the same time as the above injection, an oral dose at 1ml/5kg of equal parts of Oxfen C Plus and Oxfen C Plain. Mix these 1:1 in equal parts and shake well. These two drenches are pretty compatible, they have similar dispersal agents, viscosity etc., and unused mixture will be fine in the short term but try to minimise the amount not used at any drenching episode. Just mix enough up for the job at hand. Remember to shake the mixture well.

Dose to the heaviest in the mob but take care if there is a large variation in live weight. If there is adjust the dose to suit. A default withhold of 91 days technically applies - hopefully further studies will get this down to a far more realistic time. With this mixture, using plain and **not** selenised Oxfen C, the dose of Se is about right.

Swedes and Animal Health

I'm sure most of you are well aware from all the publicity of the current issue with swedes affecting primarily cattle, but also sheep, grazing them. The majority of cases have been further south but we have had some here affecting both cattle and sheep.

Firstly a bit of background. All brassicas (not just swedes) contain certain chemicals called glucosinolates. When these chemicals are metabolised by the liver they are broken down and the product (or products) of this breakdown are somewhat toxic and can cause liver damage. The degree of this damage depends on the level of these chemicals. As I said, all brassicas contain these glucosinolate compounds and while levels can vary a bit, depending on various factors like the stage of growth or maturity of the plant, they are usually at low enough levels that minimal ill health or clinical signs are apparent.

In this particular bout of problems the vast majority of the animal health issues (certainly all the South Otago ones we are aware of) have arisen in stock grazing the recently developed herbicide tolerant or HT swede. So what is going on here? Well, investigations are ongoing and no one knows for sure yet exactly what has happened, but it seems plausible that in the development of the variety to withstand herbicide(s) the changes in the 'makeup' of the HT swede have inadvertently resulted in higher levels of these toxic glucosinolate compounds. This has resulted in liver damage of a degree sufficient to

result in more obvious clinical signs in some of the stock grazing them. The clinical signs include photosensitivity, ill thrift and deaths in cattle, and in sheep photosensitive signs appear less prominent, but ill thrift and deaths have occurred.

It is quite possible that there are other influences - undefined weather or "seasonal" factors etc. playing a part as they do from time to time, but these should, you would surmise, apply evenly across the board to all brassicas.

Be that as it may, the fact is you/we are almost certainly not going to be in possession of the full facts by the time you have to make the decision about sowing next year's crop of swedes, as this is basically anytime now. Many of the true costs of this problem will be somewhat hidden and hard to quantify but could be considerably higher than you realise. For example (as has already occurred on one farm), unexplained reduced scanning performance in two-tooths when as hoggets they grazed on these swedes – pretty hard to connect the dots there and prove liver damage from HT swedes was behind it.

Hence in my opinion you should adopt a cautious approach and the only prudent thing to do until if and when the problem is resolved, is to avoid the HT variety and sow one of the more traditional varieties of swede this coming year (Dominion or good old Doon Major for example). Maybe by this time next year the facts may be known and you will have more information on which to make a decision, but in the meantime I would certainly advise caution.

For most of you swede grazing is probably over for the season, but if any of you still have stock (dry hoggets for example) still on swedes and have some concerns give the clinic a call. We can, with a simple blood test of say 10 animals, determine if there is some degree of liver damage evident in these stock.

New Working Dog Food

For several years now more and more farmers have been feeding their dogs Eukanuba (a premium dog food) and on the whole have been very pleased with how their dogs do on this food. However, there is the occasional dog (obviously a bit fussy!) that won't eat these, and the occasional very lean dog that still doesn't put on condition.

Royal Canin make a premium working dog diet called Energy 4800 which has higher levels of fat than Eukanuba. This makes it more palatable to fussy eaters meaning these, and also the very lean type of dog that at busy times of the year like that coming up still struggle to maintain condition, seem to do well on this diet. There are bulk deals available which make the price similar to Eukanuba. For the bulk of farmers whose dogs do well on Eukanuba, don't change but for the odd one that for what ever reason doesn't then you could try the Energy 4800.

Merchandise Matters

The list of specials, promotions etc this month is as follows:

- **Merial Ancare Sheep and Cattle Drench Products** - Receive high quality Joseph Bentley gardening tools on selected products e.g. garden spade and fork or loppers and pruners on cattle products; and small hand-fork, trowel, transplanters, weeders, and seed and glove packs on sheep drenches. All while stocks last. The Take a Mate Fishing and Christmas Ham promotions are coming soon.
- **Eprinex Pour-on 5lt** - Buy 3 x 5lt and get the fourth one free.
- **Boss Pour-on 5lt** - Buy 2 x 5lt and receive a Bakerstone Pizza box oven - while stocks last.
- **Genesis Pour-on** - Buy 2 x 5.5lt and receive the 3rd free.
- **Vetdectin Oral Drench** - Buy 20lt and receive 2lt free.
- **Cydectin Pour-on 5lt** - Receive a portable Bluetooth speaker with each 5lt.
- **Combat Topline Abamectin Pour-on 5lt** - Only \$2.34/500kg cow nett incl GST.
- **Smartshot B12** - Receive a jar of Barkers Mint Jelly with every 2 packets.
- **Meaty Bites Working Dog Food** - All purchases go in the draw for a Jumbuck Chef 6 burner BBQ. This is on display in the Balclutha Clinic and exclusive to Clutha Vets.
- **Kaiwaka Children's Wet Weather Clothing:** Come and see the over trousers, bib overalls and parkas from size 2 up. These are particularly well priced. Would make a great Christmas present from the grandparents!

Promotion Winners

Merial Ancare Wanaka Wine Tour: This trip which involves 2 nights wining and dining in Wanaka on the 7th – 9th November with the Saturday spent leisurely sampling the products of several Central Otago wineries has, through their purchase of Merial Ancare anthelmintics, been won by Todd Rowland & Sophie Pinckney of Puerua, Peter & Vanessa Hall of Black Rock, Maurice & Renee Judson of Awamangu, Ken & Bronwyn Campbell of Taumata & Lachlan McDonald of Awatea. They will be ably hosted by David & Lynette Dodge from Merial Ancare and our own resident wine slurpers (sorry I mean connoisseurs' although the term slurper might apply to Pihii!) John (Pihii) & Vicki Neave.

John A. Smart BVSc.