

sheep connect

Connecting people in the sheep business

tasmania

winter 2011

What's new

A word from the coordinators

As many of you know our focus during the past month has been safe and effective livestock vaccination techniques. During July, SheepConnect Tasmania (SCT), in conjunction with Proactive Agricultural Safety and Support Inc (P.A.S.S.) has carried out four successful workshops from Bothwell through to Longford. More than 160 sheep producers and service providers attended the workshops and the interest was so high that additional workshops have been scheduled for August.

Many thanks go both to the presenters involved in the workshops — SCT's own Andrew Bailey, Anne Taylor (P.A.S.S.), Lyndon Iles (DPIPWE) and Chris Cocker (Tas Quality Meats). Additional thanks go to our sponsors — TP Jones, Tas Quality Meats, Elders, Pfizer and Roberts, and to our practical demonstrators Jim Taylor and Jo Bradley. A final, but important thank you goes to our host farmers — Richard Johnston, Askin Morrison, John Fowler and Simon Foster, without whom we would not have been able to have the successful blend of theory and hands-on practice.

As lambing is imminent (and well underway for some producers) veterinary consultant Paul Nilon reminds us later in this newsletter that a worm management plan for this spring should be in place by now.

SCT reminds producers to keep an eye out for pre-lambing losses through abortions and consider testing for campylobacter if unusual losses are observed.

With many producers reporting a successful mating in their flocks, we are hearing the first signs of pregnancy toxemia as more twin-bearing ewes are finding it difficult to consume enough energy for themselves and growing lambs. Adequate nutrition is critical for early-lambing flocks where winter pasture growth is minimal. A twin-bearing ewe's energy requirements are equivalent to about 1.9DSE. Monitor ewe condition closely and ensure they have access to at least 1200kg DM/ha.

If you are unsure what 1200kgDM looks like go to: www.lifetimewool.com.au/pdf/EwemanagementHRZeditionweb.pdf

The recommended post-lambing a pasture target is about 1800kg DM/ha for optimal ewe and lamb survival. 🐏

Contact: Andrew Bailey
M: 0408 129 373
E: andrew.bailey@utas.edu.au

Catriona Nicholls
M: 0427 571 199
E: cat.nicholls@utas.edu.au



Breeding program produces perennials with potential

In response to the need for better-adapted and more persistent pasture options for the variable conditions in Tasmania's, low-to-medium (<700mm) rainfall regions, the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research (TIAR) has developed a range of improved perennial grass, annual legume and perennial legumes through its *Forage and Pasture Development Program*.

During the past fifteen years researchers have collected germplasm (breeding material): Spain, Portugal, France (1993), Tunisia (1995), Kazakhstan (2002) Azerbaijan (2004) and France, Switzerland (2006).

These plant-collecting missions have resulted in access to a broad array of wild material that is used as a basis for screening and the identification of traits such as salt, acid, cold, drought or waterlogging tolerance.

The main focus has been to assemble, identify and develop productive, drought tolerant and persistent perennial grasses and legumes, annual legumes and browse plants for use across low rainfall, temperate environments.

The first commercial cultivar developed within the program was the late-maturing annual Arrowleaf clover (*Trifolium vesiculosum*) variety Arrotas[®], released during 2005 through Tas Global Seeds. Since then four other cultivars have been released: Spanish cocksfoot (Uplands[®] and Sendace[®]), coloured brome (Exceltas[®]) and cocksfoot (Megatas[®]). A further four cultivars are due for release during the next three years.

Pastures on show

Seven on-farm demonstration sites trialling a wide range of perennial species have been running since 2009 and Sheep Connect Tasmanian (SCT) will be sharing stories from the sites and the breeding program in subsequent newsletters and online at:

www.tiar.tas.edu.au/extensive/sheepconnect/pastures

For fact sheets on available pasture varieties go to: www.tiar.tas.edu.au/extensive/plant-breeding 🐏

Contact: Eric Hall, TIAR

T: (03) 6336 5449

M: 0409 169 455

E: eric.hall@utas.edu.au

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OJD — it's coming to a property near you

key points

- Ovine Johne's Disease (OJD) prevalence in Tasmania has doubled during the past three years — know your risk
- Proactive management through lamb vaccination, even in unaffected flocks, is the best protection
- Actively monitor flocks through abattoir assessment and build points now to maintain trading options

As sheep producers across Tasmania work to rebuild their flocks after the drought, they are being urged to be on the front foot as Ovine Johne's Disease (OJD) takes hold of the State.

According to DPIPW senior veterinary officer Dr Bruce Jackson spread of the insidious wasting disease has been rapid during the past five years.

"Without immediate producer action OJD will soon infect flocks in every area of our State," Dr Jackson said.

"In 2009 we estimated prevalence of 4.2% and we now have evidence the disease is present in more than 7% flocks."

"However this is a very conservative estimate and we expect the prevalence could be in the order of five times this — around 35%."

"The thing all Tasmanian producers need to understand is that even if their flocks are currently disease-free, the prevalence rating of the State and the infection status of neighbouring properties will impact on their businesses."

"The key to controlling the disease spread and maintaining sheep trading opportunities for Tasmanian producers will be a proactive



Photo: Catriona Nicholls

Vaccinate now: A proactive vaccination program, starting with this season's lambs, will provide whole-flock protection in time.

vaccination program and open and honest communication between neighbouring producers."

"Whole-flock protection is a time-consuming process so I encourage producers to start vaccinating their lambs even if signs of the disease are not yet present in their area yet — it will only be a matter of time."

Know your risk

Dr Jackson urges all sheep producers to understand their current risk and the associated management and trading implications.

"Talk to your neighbours, your local consulting veterinarian and Tas Quality Meats (TQM) abattoir to assess your status," Dr Jackson said.



* Estimated potential spread

Figure 1. Increasing prevalence of Ovine Johne's Disease (OJD) in Tasmania since 2009

"Some producers are worried about the stigma of OJD, but honest and open communication is the only hope of controlling disease spread."

Campbell Town show champion fleece producer Antony Gunn, Forton, identified OJD within his flock during 2006 and goes as far to say that early exposure and acceptance has allowed him to be ahead of the game.

"Far from being a death sentence for our business, we now know that early identification and a proactive approach through vaccination is the best protection," Mr Gunn said.

"I've been really open and honest with my neighbours and friends and tell them they should be routinely vaccinating.

"We vaccinate lambs each year and it's cheap investment in the long run."

"To be honest, I absolutely feel we have OJD under control and have moved on to the next challenge."

Taking a closer look

TQM QA manager Chris Cocker regularly sees the effects of OJD on carcase weight and quality and urges producers to capitalise on the abattoir's surveillance capabilities to monitor the disease status of their flocks.

"We check all sheep from the saleyard and direct lines for a wide range of diseases as they go through the processing line," Mr Cocker said.

"From this monitoring process we provide Animal Health Australia (AHA) monthly updates on disease prevalence."

It is this information that governs the State-wide prevalence ratings that impact on Tasmania's assessment under the Assurance Based Credit (ABC) system.

However, Mr Cocker encourages producers to use this monitoring process to their advantage.

"This free service can help individual producers clarify the disease status of their business and help them start building ABC points through proactive management."

Mr Cocker is also quick to remind producers about the financial benefits of early culling in affected flocks.

"Where flocks have been infected, early culling, before wasting has impacted significantly on live weight, can lead to price advantages in the order of \$90/head."



Photo: Catriona Nicholls

What a waste: Culling early, before wastage has gone too far (middle carcass), can prevent significant impacts on carcass weights, quality and income.

"We are seeing faults in dressing, low yielding carcasses and low skin values when producers wait too long to cull affected sheep."

"In some cases, where dressed carcasses are under 12 kilograms, there is no carcase value at all."

The State of play

The management and control of OJD across Australia is based on the assessment of animal health risk under the ABC system (see box story). This assessment takes into account the prevalence rating of the region and the actions producers take to manage the disease, such through the use of vaccine and grazing management practices aimed at creating pastures with low levels of bacterial contamination.

Prevalence areas are regions defined by the proportion of flocks in the region that are estimated to be infected with OJD, based on the results of ongoing abattoir surveillance.

"Tasmania currently has a medium prevalence rating (2 points), but with recent increases in disease prevalence it is likely the rating will increase to a high prevalence rating (0 points) when the national review is carried out during 2013", Mr Cocker warned.

"This means all Tasmanian properties will soon start with an ABC score of 0 points, whether or not the disease is present in their flocks."

"It is then up to them to build points by vaccinating and processing cull stock through TQM to gather objective data on their flocks."

"We send our results to AHA and through DPIPW, producers are advised of their points according to their disease status.

"Processing lines containing at least 150 sheep found negative for OJD from a single property identification code (PIC) over a two-year period is required to get one point. "

"Processing lines containing at least 500 sheep found negative for OJD from a single PIC, over a two-year period, increases this status to two points."

Properties with 0 points (under the ABC system) must send sheep for direct slaughter and the only sheep they can sell through a saleyard are terminal lambs with an NLIS T tag accompanied by a Sheep Health Statement (SHS).

Properties with 1 or 2 points can sell through saleyards or Auctions Plus but must provide a copy of the SHS.

Currently sheep can move between 0 point properties on Flinders Island but not on mainland Tasmania.

Sheep must have at least one point and a SHS to move into Tasmania from the mainland or Flinders Island unless consigned for slaughter within three days.

For more information on OJD go to www.ojd.com.au

Contact:

DPIPWE: Dr Bruce Jackson

T: (03) 6336 5306

Dr Rowena Bell

T: (03) 6336 5468

TQM: Producers wanting to assess their status can contact TQM's livestock coordinator Jake Oliver:

M: 0439 651 476

E: Tasquality@bigpond.com

OJD — a snapshot

Ovine Johne's disease (OJD) is a serious wasting disease of sheep caused by bacteria (*Mycobacterium paratuberculosis*) that live mainly in the intestines, but can also survive in favourable (wet, cool) environments for more than 12 months.

OJD disease affects sheep by causing a thickening of the intestinal wall, which blocks the normal absorption of food. The animal is hungry and eats but cannot absorb any nutrients. This results in wasting and finally death.

Disease spread

Transmission and infection is mostly through grazing pastures soiled by infected animal faeces.

Infection can occur at any age through contaminated udders, pasture, feed or water. Young sheep are most susceptible.

Bacteria moves primarily through stock movement such as strays, purchased stock and agistment, although property to property transmission is common in infected areas.

Control options

Vaccination and grazing management are the primary control tools. Contact your local veterinarian to assess your current risk and develop the most cost-effective and practical control program for your property.

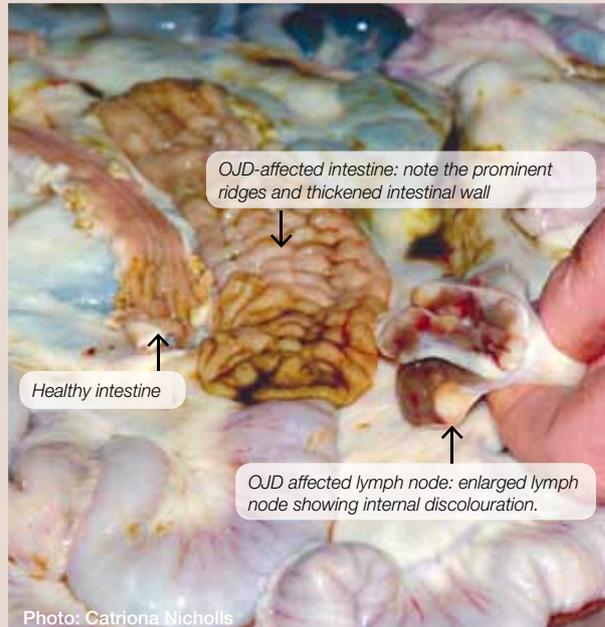


Photo: Catriona Nicholls

Hard to digest: OJD causes thickening of the intestinal wall, blocking nutrient absorption (normal intestine at far left; affected intestines in middle and affected lymph node a far right).

Getting to the point

Sheep to be moved or sold are covered by a Sheep Health Statement that includes the ABC score — the higher the score the lower the risk of OJD.

Under the ABC Scheme, producers can claim credit points for their sheep under four categories. These are:

- **CATEGORY A.** Area and flock of origin — The known Johne's disease status of the flock and area in which the flock is located.
- **CATEGORY B.** OJD testing history, including flock tests for the SheepMAP, as well as abattoir testing
- **CATEGORY C.** Vaccination history
- **CATEGORY D.** Risk assessment of consignment sheep

Each additional credit represents an approximate four-fold decrease in the risk that the sheep are infected.

So sheep in a consignment with a score of 4 are about 64 times less likely to be infected than in a similar consignment of sheep with a score of 1 (that is, the difference of 3 credits means a difference in risk of $4 \times 4 \times 4 = 64$).

Buying sheep with a high ABC score reduces the risk of introducing OJD. 🗨️



Photo: Pamela Lawson

Work with the system: Producers looking to sell sheep need to understand the ABC Scheme clearly to ensure they maximise their marketing opportunities.



Special offer — *Making More from Sheep* manual sale

The MMfS manual is being offered at a special sale price of \$50 including GST at www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au or contact Andrew Bailey on (03) 6336 5385. 📞

Stay focussed

Local veterinary consultant Paul Nilon, reminds producers that in the run up to lambing worm egg counts (WECs) in ewes have increased, as would be expected. However, to date there have been few reports of clinical parasitism killing ewes or lambs.

“Egg counts in weaners seem to have peaked, and should drop as (if) spring advances,” he said.

“By now producers should have their pre-lambing management in place (if not actually executed). Early lambers without the protection of long-acting products should consider a lamb marking drench.”

“Make the decision on WECs and what you are seeing: daggy ewes and poor lambs are fair indicators of worm burdens. Moreover, we seem to have hit a bit of a feed wall — if ewes have little in front of them worms can take a toll.”

A final word about OJD — many producers have received the rude surprise of a recent OJD diagnosis in their flocks. Clinical OJD cases not only contaminate the ground with bacteria, they frequently carry enormous worm burdens and become one-sheep worm contamination units — remove them from the flock! 📞

Contact: Paul Nilon, Nilon Farm Health
E: pandonilon@bigpond.com



Photo: Catriona Nicholls

A strong start: ensure your lambs get the best start by implementing a rigorous worm management program this spring.

Upcoming workshops

Five easy steps

Phosphorus (P) is essential for productive and profitable pasture growth, but as input costs continue to soar it can be difficult to know just where and how much fertiliser to apply.

The *Five Easy Steps* online tool can guide producers through the decision-making process to ensure they get the best bang for their buck.

For more information:

W: www.mla.com.au/Publications-tools-and-events/Tools-and-calculators/Phosphorus-tool

If you would be keen for Sheep Connect Tasmania to run a practical workshop based on the *Five Easy Steps* program contact Cat or Andrew. 📞

Is your drench working?

According to WormBoss coordinator Arthur Le Feuvre, researchers and others in the worm management industry were recently asked: “What percentage of producers in your region or country has any factual evidence of the drench resistance status of their property before they buy a drench?”

The aim was to determine whether producers have any factual knowledge of which drenches actually are effective on their property.

“The good news is that it was thought that Australian sheep producers have the highest factual knowledge (about 10–15%),” Arthur said.

Other sheep producing countries ranged from 1–5%.

“However, the other way of looking at this is that 85–90% of Australian sheep producers have no idea if the drench they buy will be effective (other than their visual observations and ‘gut feeling’),” Arthur said.

“If we compare sheep on a property to an expensive piece of machinery, I’d bet the machinery has its oil and water checked a lot more often than the sheep are checked for worms.”

“And I’d bet the oil used is the right stuff!”

Arthur estimated the cost of a 5000km grease and oil change on a farm-based four-wheel drive to be about \$200–\$300 — about the same as a couple of worm egg counts (WECs) with larval differentials.

“One WEC before drenching, one WEC after drenching to make sure the drench was effective,” he said.

“Which is the most important for the operation — keeping the LandCruiser running well or keeping the sheep running well?”

Contact: Arthur Le Feuvre, WormBoss coordinator
E: arthur@vetspets.com.au 📞

useful links

- Australian Wool Innovation** www.wool.com
- Meat and Livestock Australia** www.mla.com.au
- Sheep CRC** www.sheepcrc.org.au
- LiceBoss** www.liceboss.com.au
- WormBoss** www.wormboss.com.au
- Making More from Sheep**
www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au
- Sheep Genetics Australia** www.sheepgenetics.org.au
- Australian Merino Superior Sires**
www.merinosuperiorsires.com.au
- Beyond the Bale** digital.wool.com.au
- EverGraze** www.evergraze.com.au
- Latest market information** (beef and sheepmeat)
www.mla.com.au/Prices-and-markets
- Latest market information** (wool) [wool.landmark.com.au/
daily-wool-prices-and-sales-roster/](http://wool.landmark.com.au/daily-wool-prices-and-sales-roster/)
- Latest weather** www.bom.gov.au
- FarmPoint** www.farmpoint.tas.gov.au



Voluntary code for sheep management

Following an extensive consultation process with industry, the Minister for Primary Industries and Water, Bryan Green, has agreed to progress regulatory changes to discontinue prescription of four 'exotic' breeds of sheep (Dorper, Damara, Awassi and Karakul) and their crosses under the *Animal Farming (Registration) Act 1994*.

In conjunction with removal of this legislative control, it was agreed that a voluntary code of practice for all sheep would be developed to encourage the adoption of best practice management across the whole industry.

The Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) has accordingly developed a draft Code of Practice for managing sheep in Tasmania, and is seeking input from stakeholders to further develop and refine the Code.

The Draft Code of Practice is available at the Farmpoint website: www.farmpoint.tas.gov.au/farmpoint.nsf/news/77201EF665CE8BFCCA2578E000044494

Input of any aspect of the draft Code is welcomed. Comments are invited by Friday 9 September 2011 and should be addressed to:

Heather Neate Agricultural Policy Group
DPIPWE
PO Box 46
Kings Meadows 7249
T: 6336 5146
E: heather.neate@dpiwwe.tas.gov.au

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Andrew Bailey PO Box 46
F: (03) 6336 5395 KINGS MEADOWS 7249



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