

Animal Health Update

South East Local Land Services

July 2019

LOCAL DISEASE WATCH

Alex Stephens, District Veterinarian Yass

July can be a tough month as cattle enter late pregnancy and ewes are either lambing or in late pregnancy. **Seasonal condition workshops** were conducted and well attended in the Reids Flat, Wee Jasper, Gunning and Peelwood areas in late June. These sessions were conducted by Phil Graham of Graham Advisory and the local District Veterinarian. They covered **pasture budgeting** including assessing the current feed situation, quantifying the feed on hand in kgDM/ha and looking at expected growth rates based on data collected. We then covered the increasing **nutritional requirements of stock** in late pregnancy and lactation and feeding options to meet nutritional requirements of livestock on hand.

By far the most likely animal health problem to be facing stock over the next months is a deficiency of energy. Matt Leischke has prepared feeding guides to assist you to get your **supplementary feeding** rates right. It is often when there is still short green feed available that we find it hardest to know how much to feed. These feed guides are an excellent tool.

[Cattle feeding guide](#)

[Sheep feeding guide](#)

Current animal health observations are:

- **Barbers Pole Worm**- most faecal egg counts (FEC) are still showing a high proportion of barbers pole worm and some very high counts. Although it is too cold for the worm lifecycle to complete, sheep can still be grazing up larvae that hatched in warmer autumn. This blood sucking parasite causes anaemia, it is very important to consider this disease and monitor for it using a FEC, particularly in your weaners and ewes. An effective drench and pasture rotation is very important in management of this worm.
- **Fluke**- there have been several positive Fluke ELISA (the blood test for fluke) in cattle and FECs in sheep. It is worth considering and monitoring for this disease in fluke prone areas if you are seeing signs of weight loss or failure to gain weight. Winter is an important strategic time to control fluke to give you better control of fluke in the summer.
- **Pulpy Kidney**- there have been a number of sporadic losses this month in sheep and cattle that have been attributed to pulpy kidney. Changes in supplementary feed or

paddocks, time off feed and increased clover intake have all contributed to losses. It is a reminder again to keep your 5 in 1 vaccines regular, especially when supplementary feeding stock. Often sporadic losses can be seen in wethers that have not had a yearly booster. It is also important that ewes and cows are given a booster before parturition to ensure the lamb or calf has immunity prior to marking.

- **Selenium deficiency-** In areas known to be selenium deficient, seasons where pasture growth is dominated with clover are ones where clinical disease may be seen unless preventative action is taken. Ensure ewes are supplemented to prevent losses in lambs.
- **Poor pregnancy testing results in cattle-** investigations have been conducted to rule out infections and micronutrient causes but cause most likely to be due to lower body condition score without an improving plane of nutrition at joining.
- **Abortions in cattle and sheep-** although an answer is not always found it is important to know that your DV is here to help you rule out infectious causes. Some important causes of late term abortion can be vaccinated against.
- **Ketosis-** or pregnancy toxaemia has caused deaths in both cattle and sheep. Ensure late pregnant animals are getting the nutrition they need.

What is new?

District Veterinarians have received funding assistance from NSW DPI to assist producers in working on drought related issues. This may mean that we can provide funding for lab testing on property visits to improve diagnostics, or stock feed analysis to assist in feed budgeting. [Contact us](#) to find out more.

MLA has released an updated [fit to load guide](#).

Remember the importance of your farm biosecurity plan. See the new look [Farm Biosecurity network website](#).

MAKING THE TOUGH DECISIONS - Lessons from the north

Mark Doyle, District Veterinarian Far South Coast.

Farming is a tough game, and in Australia's climate it is one of the toughest. Whilst drought is the norm for a lot of Australia in the South East of New South Wales we have been historically protected from some of its worst effects seen elsewhere in the country. As a result we can be somewhat insulated from the tough decisions which are normal management decisions for farmers in more drought prone areas.

Whilst feeding and a knowledge of supplementary feeding is paramount to survival of short term feed shortages, bigger management decisions have to be made in times of extended feed shortage. The latest [BOM mid-range weather forecast](#) is for a dry winter. There is no excuse to ignore this. With a decreasing supply of supplementary feed and it's ever increasing cost,

keeping animals alive through winter with supplementary feeding should only be seen as one of the options available. The other main option is to sell stock.

Selling stock has multiple benefits. Not only does it mean less reliance on supplementary feed but it has the added advantage of resting your country. This means that when the season does break there is a better chance of it recovering more quickly. For the sake of sustainability of your property it may be a better decision to just sell everything and take a well-earned break. The debate here is that it will be too difficult to restock when the seasons turn, but if you factor in cost of your time feeding and the cost of feed, then paying an elevated price for stock after the break might not be that expensive after all.

I can draw on the experience of a family near Longreach for this one. They had just over 150mm from Cyclone Trevor in March. This was the largest rainfall event they have recorded since 2010. Being eternal optimists they had continued to hand feed sheep until they got this most recent rain and have ended up with some very expensive ewes and wethers as a result. Their neighbours sold everything and moved to town and got jobs where they could 7 years ago. They still visit their property for basic maintenance and plan to return when the seasons turn. In the meantime they have enjoyed a better quality of life and an easier to manage financial position.

Selling stock before conditions get dire is an art in itself. The important step is for farm management to set a **few hard guides** to follow, and to regularly reassess your situation. You don't have to sell all your stock. A traditional approach in northern breeding operations is to sell back to a breeding nucleus the moment it looks like the wet season has failed. This can mean selling half of the normal stocking rate on most properties straight away, and then having further trigger points to sell more as conditions don't improve.

Your approach could involve selling by a particular calendar date if there is no rainfall, or selling if prices fall or rise to a certain level. Whatever the indicator used it should be lived by. Better to regret an early sale than missing the chance to sell stock in saleable condition.

I had a client in North Queensland some years ago who sold heifers and steers for 10c/kg through the Longreach saleyards. This meant he was getting \$13/head for 130kg weaned heifers and \$27/head for reasonably well grown steers. He said to me that 'he may as well have rolled up a \$100 note and placed it up their backsides as he loaded them on the truck' but, he did not regret the decision. He HAD to in his words 'sell them not smell them'.

You can also use simple management to help you make your decisions. For example one approach might be pregnancy testing (with foetal aging) and selling anything not pregnant. Then if poor conditions continue, selling anything that is not going to be falling in a nice tight defined calving/lambing period. Further decisions could be made based on age or body condition and so on.

Another common debate about selling is not wishing to part with one's own breeding stock or genetics. At the end of the day this is a sentimental attachment and in most instances,

unfortunately, your stock will not be truly genetically superior to the general population. If however you do feel this is the case there are options available. For the price of selling a few animals it is quite easy to buy a liquid nitrogen canister and hire someone to come and flush your favourite cow or sheep for some embryos. Freeze them and put them into whatever you can buy when the drought breaks and hey presto – you've got your old genetics back.

When selling stock in poor condition you also have legal obligations. You are obliged to provide certain welfare conditions to your animals. Severely emaciated animals are [unfit to load](#) and must be either fed to improve condition or destroyed. Animals below fat score 1 have minimal reserves and are best transported direct to their destination rather than spend the extra time off feed going through the sale yards. Please refer to the references listed at the bottom of this article for details and consult with your local DV and LLS staff with any questions. You can also sell on direct consignment to your local abattoir in certain situations, contact their buyers or your agent for details.

The most important thing to do is to have a management plan in place and have trigger points for decisions so you don't keep 'moving the goalposts' as things get worse. Act on your trigger points, and don't regret a decision once it is made. Most importantly look after yourself and take note of the mental condition that you are in. We are all vulnerable when times are tough and you are never going to be alone in this.

Please don't hesitate to call your local LLS office for help with or any advice on the practice and implementation of management decisions in drought. We are here to help.

Resources:

[DPI Drought Hub](#)

[Animal welfare during dry times](#)

MLA has released an updated [fit to load guide](#)

WORMS IN ALPACAS AND GOATS

Josephine Ginty Veterinary student and Henry Clutterbuck, District Veterinarian Goulburn

Highlights

Cause: Barbers pole, black scour worm and small brown stomach worm, living in contaminated soil and faeces of infected animals.

Risks: Young animals weaned onto contaminated pasture, or any animal with a high burden. Pasture contamination and worm burdens are usually highest in late spring and summer.

Diagnosis: WormTest (faecal egg count) or post mortem by LLS DV or local vet.

Treatment: Effective drenching based on advice from an LLS DV or local vet can be very successful.

Prevention: Drenching and management strategies.

What are the effects of worms in alpacas and goats?

Different worms cause different problems, but the main consequences are diarrhoea, ill-thrift and poor growth. Barbers pole worms can cause anaemia, 'bottle jaw' (accumulation of fluid under the jaw) and acute death if infections are severe. Scour worms cause profuse diarrhoea and inappetence, which can progress to wasting and death.

Which animals are at risk?

The effects of worms are usually worst in young animals that haven't been drenched and are weaned onto contaminated pastures. However, disease can occur in any animal of any age that has a high enough worm burden. Drenched animals will show signs of disease if drench-resistant worms are present.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis of worms can be confirmed with a WormTest that detects worm eggs in faeces. A post mortem can also indicate worm burden and identify the specific species present.

Prevention/Treatment

Prevention of worms requires an integrated approach of pasture and animal management and effective drenching. Contamination of pasture should be minimised by clearing alpaca dung piles, resting or spelling pastures, and drenching animals with a known worm problem before moving them onto new pasture at risky times of year (late spring and summer). Drenching females in late pregnancy also reduces the chance of dams infecting their offspring.

Treatment should be done in response to a positive WormTest. The ideal drench is a mix of three or more different chemicals that have each been tested and confirmed to have no resistance at your property. Drenches should be regularly rotated to reduce the chance of resistance developing. Many drenches are 'off-label' in alpacas and goats. This means that there is no dosage recommended on the label. Using the correct product and dose rate is important and requires consultation with the LLS DV or your local vet before use.

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