RIVERINA LOCAL LIVESTOCK UPDATE

May

NSW GOVERNMENT | Local Land Services

www.lls.nsw.gov.au/riverina

Case study:

LAMB MORTALITY

District Veterinarian Evie Duggan

Sheep

The most common reason for lambs to die in the first week of life is that they fail to ingest sufficient nutrients to survive.

There are 3 main causes of lambs failing to ingest sufficient nutrients:

1. *Low birth weight*
2. *Difficult birth (dystocia)*
3. *Inappropriate behaviour by either the ewe or lamb*

These factors are all interrelated to one another, often with one cause leading to the other, but the key underpinning factor behind all of them is the nutritional status of the ewe.

LOW BIRTH WEIGHT:
A lamb that has a small birth weight is more susceptible to the effects of cold and developing per-acute hypothermia. A smaller lamb has a greater surface area compared to volume - meaning that it loses heat faster than a bigger lamb, which has a smaller surface area compared to volume. They also have less brown fat in comparison to a larger 4kg lamb, leaving them with lower energy reserves to assist them in maintaining body temperature and warding off starvation. Smaller lambs are often weaker, therefore taking longer to search for the udder.

DIFFICULT BIRTH (DYSTOCIA):
During the process of a difficult birth lambs suffer the effects of asphyxia, trauma to the head and neck area and/or internal organs. Injuries sustained during a difficult birth substantially reduce the lambs ability to find the udder or follow the ewe. In some cases injuries will be severe enough to be the cause of death, rather than the failure to ingest nutrients. A ewe that has a difficult or prolonged birth is more likely to leave her lambs than a ewe that has a short birth. A long, difficult birth can be caused by multiple factors - including a ewe in poor condition, a ewe with an excessive body condition score or large lambs.

INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR BY EWE OR LAMB:
If allowed, most ewes will isolate themselves prior to lambing. Grooming of the lamb commences immediately and vocalisation of the ewe and lamb to each other begins. While the ewe is cleaning the lamb, the lamb should be attempting to rise. These cues are important to the development of the ewe-lamb bond. The ewe-lamb bond is vital as it leads to behaviours in the ewe including protection of the lamb and leads to the lamb sucking and continuing to recognise as its own.

Knowing this information, disruptions to the ewe and lamb during the first 6 hours should be avoided if possible. A lamb should be standing within 30 minutes of being born and start searching for the udder. During the lamb's search, the ewe may stand still or continue to circle. This circling behaviour typically lasts longer in maiden ewes, but will normally stop within a few hours. The time that it takes a lamb to stand, locate the udder and suck is closely related to the likelihood of survival. A lamb that has had a difficult birth or is smaller is more likely to take longer.

Starvation, mismothering and exposure are intricately related and stem from a failure of a successful ewe-lamb bond. The most effective and impactful change to management that can be made to reduce lamb mortality is to improve the nutrition of the ewe herself. **The nutrition of the ewe has far reaching effects on lamb survival.**

NSW GOVERNMENT | Local Land Services

Case study:

GET EWE MASTITIS UDDER CONTROL

District Veterinarian Dione Howard

Sheep

CASE HISTORY

A producer called with approximately 25% of his mob of four and five year old first cross ewes presenting with red, swollen udders. These ewes were halfway through a six week lambing period and had been grazing an early sown barley crop since the start of lambing. Prior to lambing the ewes had been grazing stubbles and had no udder issues. Both ewes that had already lambed, as well as those close to lambing appeared to be affected.

CLINICAL EXAMINATION

Affected ewes were yarded and examined from a distance - the more severely affected ewes walked with discomfort. Three ewes were tipped for closer examination - each udder was enlarged to varying degrees, painful and hot, with reddened skin. Milk samples were collected from each ewe - one had abnormal yellow milk.

DIAGNOSIS

The milk samples were cultured and all revealed a *Staphylococcus* infection.

SO, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Staphylococcus is one of two types of bacteria which most commonly cause mastitis in ewes (the other is Mannheimia species). The severity of mastitis varies depending on the bacterial species - some can cause the udder to become gangrenous and ewes become severely ill within 12-24 hours. While this case was less severe, don't wait to call your veterinarian if you notice signs of mastitis in your flock as it is important to begin treatment early in the course of disease. Mastitis of any severity can decrease weaning rates and impact lamb growth rates. Affected ewes and their lambs should be separated from the rest of the mob as they can be a potential source of contamination for unaffected ewes.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO PREVENT MASTITIS?

Predisposing factors for developing mastitis are often outside the control of producers but where they can be managed should be considered during the face of an outbreak. These predisposing factors include:

- Milk stasis (which occurs at lambing and weaning)
- Teat damage - shearing or crutching wounds, scabby mouth infection
- Udder damage caused by lambs - biting or bunting the udder
- Environmental conditions - bare areas such as sheep camps contaminated with faeces, cold weather reducing blood flow to the teats
- Improved pasture has been associated with higher incidence of mastitis

Mastitic ewes should be culled from flocks at weaning or before joining to remove potential sources of infection for other ewes and future lamb losses associated with defective udders.

For further information: https://www.mla.com.au/research-and-development/search-rd-reports/final-report-details/Animal-Health-and-Biosecurity/Importance-and-epidemiology-of-mastitis-in-the-Australian-sheep-flock/3440

Announcements + additional warnings

PURCHASING STOCK FROM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Current stock prices in Western Australia have led to an increase in the number of sheep making the trip over. It is important to remember that these stock have been off feed and under stress for an extended period of time. On arrival the following steps should be taken to minimise the risk of disease:

1. Provide ad lib access to a mineral loose lick containing lime,
2. Avoid putting on short green pick without access to roughage,
3. Provide roughage ensuring they good gut fill prior to grazing lush pastures/crops,
4. Minimise stress when handling.

In regards to scanned in lamb ewes;
While Western Australian guidelines state that ewes are able to be transported up to four months pregnant, such a long journey is not appropriate in late gestation. For example, such a long journey is high risk for ewes that are due to lamb in 5 weeks.

Veterinary advice should be sought regarding trucking ewes three months pregnant or more.

UNDERSTANDING PIG BIOSECURITY – PIG HEALTH AND DISEASES IN NSW

With the increasing threat of exotic diseases such as African swine fever (ASF) being introduced into Australia, the NSW Department of Primary Industries, Local Land Services and Charles Sturt University have partnered on a NSW Pig Health and Biosecurity project in order to better understand pig owner and producer practices and beliefs regarding pig health and disease prevention, preparedness and biosecurity across NSW.

Whether you are a hobby pig farmer, have a pet pig, a rescue pig, a Christmas pig or are a semi-commercial or commercial producer, we want to hear what's important to you when thinking about protecting your pigs from pests and disease. Your insights will be used to develop practical and targeted education and training opportunities that will support you and your fellow pig owners and producers across NSW boostpig and farm biosecurity practices to help protect your pigs from unwanted pests and disease, like African swine fever!

Please take the NSW Pig Biosecurity – Health and Disease Survey* - visit www.surveymonkey.com/r/NSWpigs

**All survey responses are anonymous, no personally identifiable information is collected and all responses will be presented in an aggregated form.*

RESEARCH TO HELP PRODUCERS GET THE MOST OUT OF LAMB FEEDLOTS

A Charles Sturt University PhD student, Tom Keogh, is calling for people who own or manage lamb feedlotting enterprises in Australia to complete a short survey online to aid research. Fuelled by a rapid growth in feedlot production systems research aims to understand current practices and identify constraints to growth rates to guide further research to improve lamb feedlot performance.

"Many producers have turned to feedlotting lambs as a way to add value to lambs and grain, capitalise on the strong market demand, and manage seasonal variability," Mr Keogh said. "But there's not a lot of scientific research available to help guide management decisions and the growth rates of lambs in these systems do not always meet expectations."

Mr Keogh is calling for people who own or manage lamb feedlotting enterprises in Australia to complete a short survey online. ***Visit www.research.net/r/Lamb-Feedlot***

Please see the following link for more information: https://news.csu.edu.au/latest-news/research-to-help-producers-get-the-most-out-of-lamb-feedlots

A REMINDER OF WHAT YOU'RE POTENTIALLY BUYING IN WHEN RESTOCKING

The recent (and wonderful) change in season has meant that many producers are taking the opportunity to restock or utilise feed on offer by purchasing stock to finish.

When introducing stock on farm there are a few diseases to be mindful of, such as:

- Footrot
- Lice
- Ovine Johne's disease
- Ovine brucellosis
- Worm burdens (with a differing population & potential resistance to your property)

Risk:	Management:
Footrot	Inspect stock in the yards - inspect any lame animals for evidence of 'sweat' between the toes or under run of the hoof wall. Continue to monitor once introduced to the property - the conditions on your property may allow footrot to 'express'.
Lice	Inspect stock in the yards - look for any signs of animals itching or evidence of rub on the fleece.
Ovine Johne's Disease	Check the sheep health declaration - pay attention to if they have been vaccinated with **Gudair**. If retaining merino wethers for wool, this is often one that is missed.
Ovine Brucellosis	You should never purchase rams out of the saleyard. They are someone's culls for a reason. Rams should be purchased from a brucellosis free accredited stud.
Worm burden (with a different population & potential resistance)	Carry out an induction drench or a Worm Egg Count establishing that there is no worm burden.

Utilise sheep and cattle health declarations - they are essential to minimising the risk of introducing disease on farm.

For further information see: http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/739107/Buying-sheep-the-general-biosecurity-duty-and-how-to-avoid-health-hazards.pdf

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Upcoming online events

BACK TO BUSINESS WEBINAR SERIES

19 May **>** Hear from Agri Partner Consultant Hamish Dickson who will discuss short term business resilience opportunities, including cashflow considerations, feed/sell/agist opportunities, market scenarios as well as considerations for the seasonal forecast. This webinar will help you set a pathway forward as you get BACK TO BUSINESS.

26 May **>**Hear from Rural Directions Consultant, Simon Vogt, who will discuss ways to build long-term resilience into our business - and cover topics such as budgets, business structure, farm management and succession planning.

2 June **>** Achieve Ag Consultant, Nathan Scott will discuss strategies for rebuilding your herd or flock using both best management and genetics to get the best reproductive outcome, setting your business up for success.

9 June **>** We will be joined by Communications and Evaluation Manager, with Integrity Systems Company, Kathleen Allan. Kathleen will discuss the importance of Maintaining the integrity of Australia's red meat and wool industries.

Please visit sheepconnectnsw.com.au/tools/ for full info

This months podcast pick

WORMCASTS
Wormcasts are podcasts produced by Paraboss that cover parasite management topics including worms, flies, lice, ticks and fluke for sheep, cattle & goats. Tune in (or read the transcript online) to get back to the theory that should be underpinning decision making, but that sometimes gets lost amongst product sale & choice.

*Jump online for more information: https://www.paraboss.com.*au/multimedia/podcasts.php

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