

Animal Health Update

South East Local Land Services

January/February 2019

Disease Watch

Alexandra Stephens District Veterinarian Yass

Summer storms, heat wave conditions and short green feed have brought a variety of issues for producers this January. Summer weeds are enjoying the conditions, and while most animals will usually avoid bitter plants, hunger has driven some to consume toxic plants.

Beware pyrrolizidine alkaloid toxicity and liver damage from plants such as heiliotrope, fireweed and patterson's curse. Watch for photosensitisation from plants such as the panic spp grasses or St John's Wart. Beware oxylate toxicity from many of the common forbs eaten when hungry stock are locked in yards; and watch for staggers syndromes from phalaris and rye grasses or other plants.

On the worms front, more testing for liver fluke has occurred this month, in both cattle and sheep. Most of the cattle tested have been with the pooled blood tests and have been positive. These tests are a valuable and accurate way of assessing fluke levels and your fluke control program. Consider asking your District Vet to assist with surveillance for fluke on your property or ask your private vet to collect samples for you when they are pregnancy testing. Clinical signs of fluke at this time of the year can be weight loss, scouring, bottle jaw, anaemia and even death.

Summer rainfall and short green grass have seen recent increases in worm egg counts with both barbers pole and nematodirus counts increasing. The best tool in ensuring you stay on top of barber's pole worm is 4-6 weekly faecal egg count monitoring and being on the watch for signs of anaemia or weakness. The recent run of temperature extremes over 40 will certainly have done a lot to control worm larvae and eggs on pastures

where the grass is low, but beware areas where sheep are condensing their grazing into soaks where the grass is green. Barbers pole levels can build up very quickly in infected stock under the right conditions. When assessing your need for the use of long acting products look carefully at the pasture conditions and seek veterinary advice.

Nematodirus numbers have increased as a result of recent hatching of the hardy eggs due to the recent rainfall events and the grazing of short green pick. In some cases this has caused scouring in weaners.

Coccidia counts have also been increased which is generally reflecting trail feeding of young weaners on the ground. Producers are encouraged to be on the watch for scours and to contact their veterinarian as there are many different causes. Nutritional stress weakens the immune system, so it is vitally important that weaners are on a ration which is allowing them to gain weight and maintain their immune system.

Water quality is very important. With increasing temperatures and humidity on the coast and very high temperatures inland, livestock producers are reminded to reduce the impacts of heat stress by ensuring stock have access to clean good quality water. Recent storm events have fouled many dams. Both cattle and sheep can refuse to drink water when shifted to new paddocks because either the dam or river was too low, poor quality or just plain dirty. When sheep or cattle are in feed lot situations water supply, quality, cleanliness and palatability is extremely important for animal health and growth rates. The data supporting this is significant. Check water temperature and visually for faecal matter and algal blooms. Ideally watering spots are shaded. Consider doing water quality tests. Kits are available by



ordering online or collecting from your nearest LLS office. Ensure stock have access to shade in forms of tree cover, constructed shelters and/or naturally undulating paddocks and gullies. Handle stock in the earlier or cooler parts of the day.

DPI water quality test kits

tests: <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/about-us/services/laboratory-services/water-testing/tests-available>

Ordering Online: <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/about-us/services/laboratory-services/kits-and-media/order-sample-collection-kits>

Foot health survey of sheep flocks in NSW

A postgraduate student research project is being conducted at The University of Sydney aimed at investigating sheep health and in particular the impact of foot health. There are a range of conditions that can affect the foot/h hoof and welfare of sheep in NSW. The project is being conducted in an effort to identify the causes of foot problems, prevalence of foot diseases, risk factors contributing to disease, as well as the financial and animal welfare impact. A survey is being conducted to collect information and data that will provide a greater understanding of the issues in the industry and contribute to improving management strategies.

The questionnaire is open to all sheep producers within NSW who agree to participate. The findings will be presented to industry bodies and published in scientific journals. Any personal information collected during the questionnaire will remain confidential. The questionnaire may be completed via an online survey, in person or via telephone at a convenient time.

For additional information or to participate in the survey please contact the following research staff or use the link provided to access the online survey.

<https://redcap.sydney.edu.au/surveys/?s=TCXYN8RKN9>

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Beware of Lead Poisoning in Cattle

Evelyn Walker District Veterinarian South Coast



Lead poisoning in cattle is more common than you think. Over the years, I have seen a number of lead poisoning cases involving young and adult cattle. Cattle are commonly affected, but sheep and goats may also become affected. The most common source of lead is from ingestion of old batteries, but I have also seen lead poisoning occur from ingestion of other lead based materials such as flashings, sump oil, grease and burnt building materials containing lead.

Lead poisoning can be fatal and cattle don't have to ingest much to develop signs of ill health either. A range of symptoms may be observed including strange behaviour, mania, depression, dullness, walking aimlessly including into fences and trees or dying of misadventure due to sudden onset blindness.

Dry times and drought may predispose cattle to ingest lead. Cattle are attracted to the salty taste of lead and return often to lick and chew at the source. I have also seen cattle on lush crops chasing lead because they were craving salt.

Blood samples can be tested from live animals and kidney samples from deceased animals to confirm or rule out lead poisoning. Often where one animal dies there will be many other animals that have sub lethal levels in their blood. Lead poisoning is a notifiable disease as it is important that lead does not end up in the food chain. This means that you must notify your local LLS District Veterinarian if you suspect or know your cattle to be lead affected. There is no cure for lead poisoning in livestock but if not lethal, the lead will eventually clear from their bodies. Lead affected animals must be detained on farm and cannot enter the food chain until further testing by a veterinarian indicates they are safe to do so.

Prevention is best by removing old batteries and lead containing material from the farm. Prevent stock from accessing burnt rubbish that may have contained lead based materials, including old lead based paints. When

moving stock to new paddocks, agisting or acquiring new land, always inspect for any potential hazards before running stock on there.

Contact your local LLS District Veterinarian for advice if you are concerned that your stock may have been exposed or want to know more about lead poisoning.

Bushfire Preparedness

Charlie Poon – 2nd y DVM student, Sydney University

Bushfires are common disasters during the hot and dry summer in Australia. To ensure the best survival chance of your animals, it is important for owners like you to be prepared.

In the case of bushfire, there are basically two options: to stay (defensive plans) or to leave (evacuative plans). A few factors should be considered when you decide your options: location and defensive capability of your facility; the type of internal/external threats it may face; number and type of animals you have; and your ability to evacuate animals from your facility. Consult with local emergency service agents and fire agencies to help you assess your defensive capabilities.

Planning to stay (defensive plans)

Identify and prepare a “safe” area on your property which has multiple access points where livestock can be located away from danger and provided with food and water.

- a large heavily grazed or ploughed paddock
- several paddocks with gates locked open (to allow animals to escape through fire)
- irrigated pasture or bare yards with at least 20m wide cleared or ploughed perimeter
- ideally with secure water supply like dam or some other sources that would not fail in the event of fire (i.e. not with plastic pipes and fittings)
- list and identify all your animals and keep the record in case they get lost
- prepare minimal supply of three days water and food in hand and make sure they are safely stored
- put together an animal emergency kit that can be easily relocated with your animals if necessary (see DPI website at the end for more details)
- prepare buffer zone within and/or surrounding your facility with fire breaks of at least 6m width and backup power supply if needed.

If safe areas are unavailable fill all water troughs and any additional containers as pipe may be compromised; clip or wire open internal gates or cut fencing to allow animals to escape from danger, and turn off any power sources that may increase risk (e.g. electrical fences, power to buildings etc). Never cut external fencing as animal escaping into traffic can cause danger.

Planning to leave (evacuation plans)

There are two main considerations of evacuation planning:

Transportation: including which animals to be moved, when they will be taken and how they will be transported (including a safe evacuation route). Ensure that you have adequate yard and loading facilities, with access for transport and suitable transport vehicle(s).

Identification: be able to list and identify all your animals and keep the record together with the ownership. Identify any problem animals (e.g. more at risk or difficult to handle) and prepare a protocol to deal with them in emergency.

Small animals

In the case of an emergency pending the first action is to restrain and confine them as this will get more difficult. Ensure your dogs or/and cats are microchipped in case they get lost. If you decide to stay, identify an area inside the house where they can be confined to avoid them interfering when you are handling the livestock. Do not keep them outdoor as they will not be able to save themselves from the fire. If you decided to evacuate, put your small animals in carry cage early and ensure contact details are on the cages.

Horses

If possible, the safest option is removing your horses early to more secure places, such as showgrounds, saleyards, racetracks or the property of family or friends. Leather or soaking wet canvas halters are recommended (beware of metal buckles), but otherwise remove everything from your horse including metal shoes. Make sure your horse is identified in case it gets loose, plus temporary identifications such as sticker on mane or livestock crayon with your name and contact details. Do not shut your horse in small yards or stables and ensure it is shut out of these areas. When you need to evacuate your horse during bushfire, saturate your horse thoroughly with water, including mane, tail and forelock.

Practice your emergency plan as part of your personal emergency survival plan and be familiar with local bushfire information sources:

NSW Rural Fire Services (RFS) website:
<http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au>

NSW RFS contact: 1800 679 737 (1800 NSW RFS).

Fire near me (smart phone app) by NSW RFS.

Fire Danger Ratings in local area.

For more information on preparing for bushfire, please visit DPI website (<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/climate-and-emergencies/emergency/community/before-an-emergency>) or NSW RFS website (<http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/plan-and-prepare>).

Visit DPI website for more details on animal emergency kit (<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/climate-and-emergencies/emergency/community/before-an-emergency/emergency-guide-animal-holding-establishments>)

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