

Sheep Farmers Newsletter December 2009

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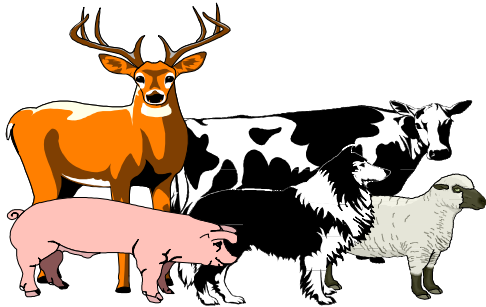
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Practice News

Goodness me – December already! Time certainly does fly when you're an official old fart (a Grandad) as my grandparents told me many years ago. As

intimated in the last newsletter Nichola Hinchy finished last month and has returned to Australia into a small animal practice in Sydney. There will be two new graduates starting early next year – Steven Butler & Alice Lee.

After quite a promising start to the spring there is really no need to say that between the cold strong winds and the hot strong winds of the last month or so, that stock feed is getting pretty tight and much of the district is getting quite dry. On the whole lambs seem to have been doing quite well up until now but with feed getting tight this could be about to change. Keep an eye on your feed levels and be prepared to be quite flexible with your weaning date decision.

Recent Animal Health Problems

1. Bloat in the Pet Lamb: Several cases of abomasal bloat in hand reared lambs occurred this season. While not of huge economic importance it is a very frustrating problem – you find the biggest, greediest lamb dead just after it's got through \$60 of milk powder. There are things you can do to lessen the likelihood of this occurring which I haven't the space to go into now. Just remember to contact the clinic for advice **prior** to rearing any next season.

2. Pulpy Kidney – There has been a little bit about. Don't delay the Ultravac vaccination - get in before you have deaths, not after they've started.

Reminders

1. Teaser Rams:- Teaser rams are a great tool to help bring the ewes into an earlier lambing pattern and advance the mean lambing date. A two week advance in the lambing date for those ewes marked at the end of the first cycle, or early in the second, could mean several hundred more lambs away early plus each cycle a ewe has before being put with the ram increases the likelihood of twinning.

Teaser rams need their small "snip" done a minimum of six weeks prior to use so you need to be looking at getting this done over the next couple of months. Teasers should be placed with the ewes no more than **17** days before the "real" rams are put out. Ratios of 1:400 – 1:500 are fine. This timing is important – a 20 - 21 day period with the teasers would mean many ewes will have cycled before the flock rams are put out meaning the actual mating date could be delayed.

2. Ram Runs:- *Brucella ovis*, an important cause of infertility, is under very good control in South Otago. As a result some farmers have neglected to get their rams checked. There are, however, other causes of infertility and we regularly come across these when checking rams – examples would be other causes of epididymitis, testicular atrophy (small balls), scrotal mange and hernias. One infertile but dominant ram can have quite an impact on your flock scanning so get your rams checked – fill out the enclosed form and return it promptly which will enable us to organise the runs more efficiently saving on time and mileage.

3. Toxovax Order Form: - This is also included with the newsletter on the back of the ram run form. As you are aware we have been doing some blood testing of wet and dry ewes for Toxo (& Campy) serology over the last few years. Talking to the Intervet Schering Plough vet who has seen the results for across the country, there is not one farm yet where Toxo has not been present at some point. Just 1 gm of faeces from a cat that is shedding the bug contains enough *Toxoplasma* organisms to cause 2000 ewe abortions!

The single life time dose of Toxovax should be given at the latest 6 weeks, and preferably 8 weeks, prior to their first mating. As it has about a 10 day shelf life from the time of arrival in the clinic pre-ordering is essential and this should be done at least 4 weeks ahead of which you require it. As an incentive to order early (which also helps the manufacturer with production scheduling) all orders placed prior to Christmas will go in the draw for one of 3 trips for two for a luxury night away at the Dansey Pass Hotel including dinner, wine and breakfast.

Incidentally, figures provided by Vet Services Hawkes Bay (who scan hundreds of thousands of ewes every year) have shown an increase in scanning over the last 5 years ranging from:

- 4.3 - 11.3% in MA ewes where Toxovax is used (as a 2th).
- 3.1 - 12.5% in 2th ewes where Toxovax is used.
- 6.8 - 11.4% in MA ewes where Campy vaccine is used (as a 2th).
- 6.9 - 14% in 2th ewes where Campy vaccine is used.

4. Optigrow Checks:- Telephone either clinic to arrange this prior to dispatch of the stock to any works. In lambs selenium and cobalt should be checked and in cattle and deer, selenium and copper. Prior to the first draft blood tests in lambs can provide useful information on cobalt and selenium status.

5. Drench Checks:- Irrespective of which drench is being used you should check on its effectiveness at least once a season, preferably after one of the earlier lamb drenches of the season. Take samples off 10 lambs 10 - 12 days post drenching (keep samples separate). Counts should all be zero – if not there is a problem that may, or may not, be drench resistance and further testing will be needed to sort this out.

6. Androvax/Ovastim:- These are the vaccines that result in an additional 20 - 25% lamb drop in vaccinated ewes. Most of you shouldn't be using these but they can have a place - for example, for short term help in a lower performing flock while other improvements are made. So this is just to remind you of the timing:

Androvax: Sensitiser 9 - 10 weeks pretup, booster 4 weeks later

Ovastim: Sensitiser 6 - 9 weeks pre-tup, booster 3 weeks later.

Pleurisy/Pneumonia Prevention

I was up at Garth Shaw's a week or so ago checking his stud rams prior to sale (my back is still recovering!). In all the chit chat he made an interesting observation. Garth has recently built, to aid stock handling, 2 - 3 sets of yards (alongside laneways) on his farm. These are simple structures basically consisting of 2 good sized parallel races and a holding pen - really no more than that. Probably cost no more than \$300 each for materials.

Anyway, instead of using his main covered yards for weaning last year he used the handiest set of outdoor yards to wean his various mobs which meant less droving, panting and dust flying about. Garth noticed at least a 75% reduction in the incidence of pleurisy on his kill sheets for the entire season. Not noticed, (because the works don't record it), but there would also have been a corresponding reduction in the incidence of pneumonia as pneumonia and pleurisy are all part and parcel of the same problem. This change will have saved Garth thousands of dollars in lowered lamb growth rates and the odd death, and backs up what I have been banging on about in various newsletters for years now.

Garth's comment was he wished he'd built them years ago! I'm sure most farms would have a couple of spots where a simple set of yards could be positioned to aid stock handling and lesson disease incidence.

Ram Selection

In a recent NZ wide farming publication there were in excess of 250 sheep studs advertising their rams for the upcoming season. These ads, and accompanying photos, portrayed a plethora of features, genotypes, phenotypes, sizes, breeds, facts, figures, testimonials, science and spin. So how do you make a genetic (ram source) choice for your farm, and what is the process that you could, or should, use for this decision?

Key questions are:

1. *What is my ewe efficiency?* This equals scanning % ÷ ewe bodyweight at mating.

180%/60kg = 3.0 = excellent

150%/65kg = 2.3 = pretty poor etc.

This is a ready reckoner of the reproductive efficiency of your ewes (= genetics) on your farm and the way you manage them. Are you satisfied with this because it is as basic as this - if they aren't in there at scanning they will never be there at point of sale.

2. *What is my lamb loss?* This equals scanning % - tailing % x 100 ÷ scanning %.

There is a wide range in NZ. Average is around 18 - 19% but it can range from 10 - 35%. Whilst management and weather have enormous roles in this, genetics do too! Where do you fit - are you average or better?

3. *What is my pre weaning lamb growth rate?* At what age do I wean lambs and at what weight? Weaning weights of lambs of different sires (i.e. variable genetics) in a controlled trial, where the only variable was the sire, have shown a range from 26.5 - 33.1 kg. At \$2/kg lwt for a store lamb, given that a ram works for 4 years, mates 80 ewes/year, with a 125% lambing, means that each ram leaves 400 progeny in his life.

The variation in range of weaning weights attributable to the sire equates to \$13.20/lamb, and over the ram's productive life this works out at a \$5280 advantage to the superior genetics and that's for one ram only. So the choice of genetics is closely associated with critical on farm productivity.

Ref: Muir et al. NZ Society of Animal Production 2006 Vol 66.

4. *What is my ewe wastage?* Ewe wastage ranges from 2 - 15%. Again very management and weather sensitive, but it also has a significant genetic component.

The above figures are key production indices on all sheep breeding properties and should be readily available to you. Ask for them. Compare your farm to your ram breeders.

Prior to your visit to choose/buy rams also consider:

What/how many do I need?

- Incorporates the correct ewe/ram ratio which depends on your farms contour and subdivision.
- Do I have a split mating, and can I use the same ram(s) for different mobs at different times?
- Have I got the correct mix of maternal and terminal rams i.e. do I have enough/too many ewe hogget replacements?
- Am I pushing the envelope? Do I have some reserve ram capacity to cope with the unforeseen problems such as foot abscess for example?

How did previous purchases do on my farm? Are all rams alive, fit and well as 5 year olds? Or did 25% of the 2th rams die in their first year?

Review historic production - See points 1 - 4 above. Satisfied?

Overall farm efficiency - Am I satisfied with the inputs my ewe flock requires? Things like parasite control, dags, bearings, mis-mothering, feet and longevity.

The Big Picture

- Where is climate change heading?
- Where is the lamb and wool market heading?

- Am I getting advice and signals on these matters from my stud?
- Is it their role at all or solely mine?

In summary:

- Objectively assess your status quo.
- Critically assess your farm production KPI's.
- Incorporate costs/inputs vs farm production.
- Review ram performance and point of sale advice you get from your ram breeder.
- Keep an eye on "tomorrow" compared to yesterday & today. Tomorrow is where the genetic choice you make today pays. You must look ahead.
- Satisfy yourself.

Thanks to Richard Lee of Vet Services, Hawkes Bay, for allowing me to plagiarise bits of his article from their client newsletter.

Current Internal Parasite Issues

See the last (Oct 09), and also the Nov. 08, newsletter for the facts surrounding the prerequisites needed to determine the effectiveness of the various drench types on your farm – so called FECRT testing. The best timing for this in South Otago is Jan – March but lambs need to be "set up" for this prior to this. Contact the clinic for more information on this.

The second point that a number of you have asked is centred round the use of Zolvix, the unique new anthelmintic from Novartis. In the June 09 newsletter I indicated that:

- It can be used as a quarantine drench as it is effective against parasites resistant to all the other actives. Matrix is the other top choice for this.
- It can be used to slow down the development of resistance to the existing drench actives. As I mentioned in the June 09 newsletter, computer modelling by Dave Leathwick has indicated that substituting one of the later lamb drenches in the season with Zolvix should slow the rate of resistance development to the regular drench(s) used. As such a single annual treatment of Zolvix towards the end of a preventative regime of treatments to lambs seems worthy of consideration.

To nail this down further, taking into account parasite dynamics locally, it would seem to me that in South Otago the best time for this drench with Zolvix would be in the late March/early April period before *Ostertagia* and *Nematodirus* have (on most farms anyway) disappeared from lambs.

Merchandise Matters

The list this month is as follows:

Merial Ancare Sheep Drench – Purchase a qualifying drench & get either a 44pce cutlery set or a 5pce knife block set plus steak knife & fork set.

- Also the famous **Merial Ancare Xmas Ham** is here. Choice of pressed or on the bone. Limited time now so don't miss out.
- **Take A Mate Fishing** – All purchases of Merial Ancare Sheep & Cattle drench qualify for the draw to take you & your mate fishing for 2 days at Stewart Island.
- **Converge, Scanda & Alliance** – Low dose combination drenches from Schering Plough – available here.
- Deferred payment available on all **Merial Ancare Drench** – charge January, pay February.
- **Vetdectin Sheep Drench** – 0.5lt free with every 10lt.
- **Dectomax Injection & Pour-on** – Purchase 2 starter packs & receive a slaughter pack consisting of knives, steel & scabbard.
- **Cydectin Pour-on** – Receive 10% extra free on the 2 & 5lt packs & get a 17lt for the 15lt price.
- **Expo Pour-on for sheep** – Instant knockdown, no withholding, only 38c/dose nett incl. GST.
- **Toxovax** – order it now & go in the draw for one of three trips to Danseys Pass. Go on, do it now! Right now! No really I mean it – right now this very minute.
- Finally with **Merial Ancare Drenches**, go in the draw to win the ultimate Outdoor Entertainment Package consisting of S/S 6 burner BBQ, table & chair set, portable bar fridge, gas heater & more. \$3,500 of value. Exclusive to CVA – see it in the Balclutha clinic.

Seasonal Arrangements

The clinics will close at 3.00pm on Christmas Eve and New Years Eve, and are closed on the statutory days only. All other days have normal opening hours.

The 2009 Clutha Vets calendar featuring local scenes will be mailed out shortly to all clients with a turnover with us since the start of our financial year of around \$1000 or greater. As always, there will be some spare copies and if you are, for example, a small block holder, but conduct the majority of your animal health business with us, feel free to ask at retail for one.



Finally, on behalf of all of us at Clutha Vets, thank you for your ongoing support through 2009. Have a good Christmas and a great New Year with lots of big lambs and a wool cheque worth more than petty cash!

John A. Smart B.V.Sc.