

CLUTHA VETS SHEEP & BEEF FARMER NEWSLETTER



Issue 203

Oct 2018



Clinic News

By Andrew Roe

The good late-winter weather continued into spring, with only really one short wintry blast a couple of weeks ago, which ensured we didn't get too complacent! Lambing and calving has, consequently, gone smoothly for most in the region. Hopefully the settled weather will continue a bit longer for those now lambing their hoggets and for the guys in the more extensive areas where lambing is peaking about now.

But even a good season can still have its problems, an example being the higher than usual incidence of metabolic problems (mainly milk fever) that many of our sheep clients have experienced; see Erin's article on page 3.

Spring Seminar

It was fantastic to see so many of you at our sheep farmer seminar a few weeks ago. As the number of confirmed attendances climbed beyond 80 we realised that a last minute change of venue was going to be required. Our Balclutha clinic seminar room is a decent size but squeezing everyone in would not only have been very uncomfortable, I'm sure it would also have breached one or two conditions on our building code!

Thankfully the Rosebank Lodge next door came to the party and hopefully all those who attended got something worthwhile from the event. A handout was printed, summarising the main points of some of the presentations. If you couldn't make it on the night, but would like a set of notes please give Andrew a call.

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Staff Update

On the staffing front we recently said goodbye to Sam Bowker our English locum who helped us out at the Balclutha clinic for a couple of months over spring. Sam works in Cheshire, one of the UK's major dairy regions and, accordingly spent most of his time here servicing our dairy clients. But, as a special treat, we let him do the occasional lambing or beef cow calving so one or two of you may have met him during his brief stay. In fact one of the highlights of his time here was spending a Sunday afternoon doing a lambing beat with one of our Hillend clients!

As one Sam left another arrived, with Sam Howarth joining the team in early September. Although recently working in England, Sam is from South Africa and is a graduate of the famous Onderstepoort veterinary school in Pretoria, Sid Taylor's old school. Those of you at the Milton end of the practice will agree that Sid turned out OK, so we have high expectations of Sam too! Sam is looking forward to working with both production animals and companion animals and we are sure you will welcome her to our wonderful corner of the world (even though she annoyingly turned up just in time to witness her Spring Boks sneak a win in Wellington!)

Incidentally, by the time this arrives in your letterbox we will know the outcome of the return match, funnily enough being played at Loftus Versfeld stadium, another landmark in Pretoria, almost as famous as its vet school!



Hopefully this time Sam won't be so pleased with the result!

Pre-Lambing "Down" Ewes

By Erin Riley

This year has been particularly bad for having down ewes pre-lambing, with farmers either experiencing more than usual, or others experiencing them for the first time. Milk fever (hypocalcaemia; low blood calcium) has been particularly bad, with even single bearing ewes being affected on some farms.

There are several reasons as to why this has been occurring, and the mild warm winter has a part to play. With the spring surge in grass growth taking place about a month ahead of what Otago/Southland is used to, immature grass just doesn't contain the nutrients that sheep need during this intensive stage in pregnancy. One possible cause of low blood calcium is actually low magnesium intake, as good magnesium levels are required for adequate calcium uptake. Young immature grass can sometimes be low in magnesium as well as calcium and other important minerals. To find out if the grass you're feeding is adequate, a mineral analysis can be done on the pastures.

One thing farmers can do if they are experiencing low calcium issues in their sheep (this can be identified with a blood test done on the down ewes), is dusting pastures (or silage/hay if this is given) with 5-10g per ewe of magnesium oxide powder ("Causmag") starting a few weeks prior to lambing. Also avoid unnecessary mustering or holding the ewes in yards off feed for long periods of time prior to lambing as these can also increase the risk of ewes going down with hypocalcaemia. Longer term solutions include adding magnesium to your annual fertiliser applications (eg serpentine super) and being careful with the timing and amounts of nitrogen and potassium applied as both these elements are known to suppress pasture magnesium availability.

If you have been experiencing larger numbers of down ewes, it may be worth discussing this with your vet to identify what the cause is (low calcium vs sleepy sickness) and to see if there is anything you can do to reduce these issues in coming years.

Editors Note:

If you are wondering who Erin Riley, the author of the above article, is, she is the former Erin Caswell! That's right, we are delighted to announce that Erin and Sam tied the knot recently in a very tranquil and picturesque spot on the shores of Lake Tekapo.

Congratulations Erin!

Ewe Abortion Summary

Andrew Roe (pictures courtesy of Jillian Clark and Martha O'Connor) *By Erin Riley*

Now that we are into October I think it is safe to report that we have not diagnosed a single case this spring of abortion and deaths caused by Salmonella Brandenburg. We have, however come across a few other nasties, with the following being a summary of those cases confirmed via laboratory testing:

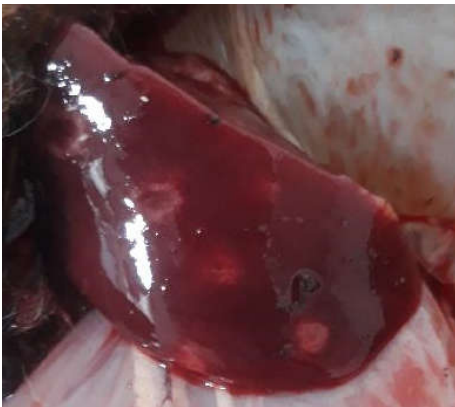
- Toxoplasma 3 outbreaks
- Campylobacter 2 outbreaks
- Helicobacter 2 outbreaks

Helicobacter is a soil organism that is responsible for occasional cases of abortion, primarily in the lower South Island.

The other two organisms, on the other hand, are extremely common with research showing Toxo to be present on all NZ sheep farms and Campylobacter fetus present on around 88%.

Which illustrates why vaccinating your ewes against these two diseases makes very good sense.

Circular lesions seen on the foetal liver in cases of Campylobacter abortion:



Classic Toxoplasmosis lesions; numerous tiny gritty white spots on the cotyledons of the placental (after-birth) leading to the description "strawberry cotyledons"



of

Do you know the drench resistance status of your farm?

With triple drench resistance now evident in the North Island, it will not be long before the issue starts appearing here in Otago/Southland. With lambing in full swing, it might seem a little early to start thinking about this, but now is a good time to start planning ahead.

The best option for checking your farm's drench resistance, the faecal egg count reduction test (FECRT for short) does require a bit of planning. For this you will need to leave about 100 lambs un-drenched at weaning time. These lambs will need to be easily identified, to enable a standard "ten pack" faecal egg count to be performed on the group to assess their worm burden. Once the egg count is high enough (this can depend on the worm burden on farm and the weather) we can then drench these lambs with different classes of drench, collect more faeces ten days post drench, then culture the larvae that they produce to assess resistance to each class of drench.

This test is pretty comprehensive and will let you know where you stand with all the drenches available on the market, helping you to make better decisions on what drenches to use and when.

If this seems like a bit much, an alternative is just to carry out a "drench check" on the drench you are using for the season. This test will not give you as much information, but can indicate if there is a problem arising. The test is done by taking FEC samples from ten lambs, ten days after drenching. At this stage we want to see ZERO eggs. Any eggs found at this stage may indicate some sort of resistance issue, and it may be worthwhile considering doing a FECRT.

If you would like to have a FECRT booked in, please contact Clutha Vets to discuss this further.

See the "Reminder" section on Page 5 for recommendations about checking the effectiveness of long acting pre-lamb worm treatments if you used those this season.

Bull Breeding Soundness

By Tom Wallbank

Bull failure is a common and costly reason for a poor mating. It is therefore a good idea to fertility test all breeding bulls annually prior to mating. Bull breeding soundness evaluation can be carried out via two main methods;

Semen collection and palpation. This can be done easily through a crush and is a good option for testing individuals as well as larger mobs of bulls. The reproductive tract is palpated as part of the examination, however physical riding ability is not observed.

Serving ability test. This is done by observing the bull's physical ability to serve a cow. This is a better test for libido and illustrates the bull's physical ability to ride and serve a cow. Semen quality is not assessed by this method.

The Gold standard method for breeding soundness evaluation is to combine both of the above methods; this illustrates ability and willingness to serve as well as evaluating semen quality.



Breeding soundness evaluation should be performed on bulls every year as bulls can breakdown at any time between, as well as during mating seasons. This is a relatively inexpensive service provided by Clutha vets, we are happy to provide semen evaluation, as well as service ability testing. Please contact the sheep and beef team for more information.

When purchasing bulls; always purchase bulls that have been fertility tested and ask by which method. If bulls are sold as not tested, get them evaluated by us to ensure they are fit for purpose. Don't risk waiting until your scanning results when using unproven bulls, get them tested well before mating starts, so that a replacement can be found if there are any problems. Purchased bulls should also have been tested BVD-free and vaccinated appropriately. Certification and a vaccination history should be provided by the seller or agent.

Black Udder in Ewes

By Jillian Clark

Gangrenous mastitis ("black udder") most commonly affects ewes who have been rearing 2-3 very good lambs and most often occurs from around tailing time onwards (lambs 4 weeks of age). In my experience it often follows feed/weather stress eg the few nasty days we had in the last week of September.

Sometimes black mastitis is preceded by sores on the teats (cuts from lambs teeth, scabby mouth on the teat or lots of little abscesses) although usually there is no prior teat condition. If she has sores on her teats prior to developing mastitis then you may notice a ewe tight on one side and reluctant to let a lamb drink. Caught and treated with antibiotics at this stage and milking some milk out of the sore side will likely affect a fairly rapid cure without any further complications. The antibiotics could be given with an anti-inflammatory/pain relief treatment too. This drug is an RVM (you will need to speak to a vet to purchase some) but will get the ewe feeling a lot more comfortable and more likely to let the lamb drink again.

The earliest symptom of a ewe with acute or black mastitis is lameness in a back leg. This is due to the pain of a swollen infected udder. It may look like she is throwing the leg out on the affected side. Treatment at this early stage before the ewe is obviously very ill has the best chance of saving the ewe and she may even still be able to continue to rear a lamb on the unaffected side. Penicillin at high doses is quite effective but you may find a tetracycline antibiotic (eg OxyVet LA) gives better success especially if it is an acute mastitis (udder is hot and hard rather than cold and purple/green/black) as it penetrates udder tissue. Ultimately you would also use an anti-inflammatory/pain relief injection too. If she has progressed to the stage where she remains sitting for you to walk up and easily catch her then euthanasia is likely the most humane option.

TIPS TO PREVENT BLACK UDDER

- Treat ewes seen with teat sores before they develop into something more serious (obviously this doesn't suit every one's farming situation.)
- Have ewes on good feed levels, so in times of bad weather they can still eat plenty and hopefully satisfy their hungry lambs.
- Vaccinate lambs for scabby mouth if scabby mouth lesions on ewes teats is an issue.
- Provide good shelter so that, in bad weather, lambs can stay sheltered ensuring their feed demand doesn't sky rocket. This will reduce the risk of them hounding the ewe for milk, possibly injuring the teat or udder.

Vitamin B1 Deficiency in Lambs

By Andrew Roe

Ever see the odd lamb wandering around, staring up at the sky? Or maybe you've come across one or two lying on their side, neck arched backwards, legs paddling.

If so there is a good chance that the animals were suffering from Vitamin B1 ("thiamine") deficiency. Left untreated such animals gradually deteriorate and die.

Ruminants such as sheep and cattle do not need to have B vitamins provided in their diet, as the micro-organisms in their rumen are normally quite capable of making them. However if there has been some disruption to this process a deficiency can occur leading to a range of neurological symptoms with the "star gazing" stance being the text book one.

Affected lambs often appear blind as well and not very aware of their surroundings, allowing you to walk up to them in the paddock. Hoggets and calves can also be affected and even ewes occasionally. If caught early enough treatment with injectable B1 can be successful.

Events that can lead to a disruption of normal rumen function and, ultimately to a B1 deficiency, include a sudden change of feed or a very high quality, low fibre diet.

We usually start seeing the problem from now on, especially where lambs are grazing a specialist finishing forage such as some of the red clover/white clover/chicory mixes. The risk can be minimised by offering a fibre source such as hay or baleage (not fine chop).

It can be hard to believe that, when offered a beautiful paddock of clover dominant pasture, lambs will show any interest at all in an old bale of hay. But you will be surprised how they will seek it out. After dealing with a case in hoggets recently the farmer concerned followed my advice and dropped a large bale of hay in their paddock. He later reported that the hoggets "demolished" it very quickly and he has had no further cases.

REMINDERS

1) Clostridial vaccination of your lambs

Historically few farmers found a need to start covering their lambs with "5 in 1" vaccine before weaning, with many not even bothering to do their works lambs at all, just focusing on their ewe lamb replacements. Increasingly we find this strategy is no longer effective, with reports of pulpy kidney-like deaths in lambs occurring between tailing and weaning. Maybe it's due to increased risk thanks to the better forages available now. Or maybe it's due to the high lambing percentages we are getting, leading to a proportion of lambs not receiving their fair share of colostrum. Whatever the cause, giving lambs their first shot of 5 in 1 at tailing may be worth considering, especially given the good returns we are currently enjoying for our lamb. Saving only two or three lambs will easily cover the cost of vaccinating a whole mob.

2) How are your long acting drenches working?

With new cases of drench resistance popping up at an alarming rate we encourage those farmers using long acting pre-lamb worm treatments (eg capsules and long acting injectable drenches) to check that they are still fully effective. This involves taking ten faecal samples from your ewes (ensure you pick up ewe samples and not those of their lambs). The appropriate time to do the check depends on the product used; have a chat with us for advice in this area.

If it is found that worm eggs are appearing earlier than expected, suggesting a level of resistance to the product used, you can minimize the harm done by giving the ewes a drench of a different active (known as an "exit drench"). In addition the information gained from the check will be useful for next spring, when deciding what pre-lamb option to take.

3) BVD testing and vaccinating

In his article on bull breeding soundness (page 4), Tom stressed the importance of ensuring that any bulls you buy have been both vaccinated against BVD and blood tested to ensure they are not carriers of the virus. Eliminating the risk of importing the disease is only part of a BVD control strategy. Vaccination of your own cattle, especially replacement heifers, is another component of ensuring your herd does not suffer the effects of this common, and potentially catastrophic, disease. And, depending on your herd's BVD history and current status it may be very worthwhile testing your young stock, enabling you to find and cull any carriers in the herd. BVD is a complex disease; give us a call if you would like help with developing a control plan.

New Product: Lanati Cordless Handpiece

Next time you pop into the clinic make sure you check out this very handy gadget; a good quality cordless handpiece made in Italy (the country that brought you spaghetti and the Fiat Bambina!). The distributors, Rurtec Ltd, demonstrated it at this year's Mystery Creek Field Days and got such a good response their first shipment was completely sold out!

The handpiece, which comes with two rechargeable batteries, each lasting for 1.5 hours, is ideal for jobs such as;

- Treating fly struck sheep (no need to take them to the yards)
- Crutching and dagging
- Tail trimming cattle
- Even shearing

A great machine for life style blocks too.

And best of all it's great value; only \$542 incl GST for members



Retail Ramblings

Boehringer Ingelheim (formerly Merial Ancare) Drenches

- ◆ The very popular Christmas Ham giveaway will be starting in mid-October when purchasing qualifying drenches such as Arrest, Switch and Matrix as well as Boehringer's cattle drench range
- ◆ Rugby jerseys available until then
- ◆ Entries into our "Take a Mate Fishing" Stewart Island trip will also be starting soon

Zoetis Promotion continues

WIN a Family Spa with any Zoetis Product.*

This includes Ultravac 5in1, Scabigard, Leptoshield as well as worm products such as Cydectin, Dectomax plus many more!

This promo has created a great deal of interest; good luck to everyone in the draw

Boss Pour-On

We still have some fleece packs available to go with the 2.5 litre packs, with Christmas hams available soon with the 5 litre option

**While Stock Lasts & Conditions apply*

Your Vets

Balclutha Clinic

John Smart	BVSc
Jason Darwen	BVSc
Rob Mills	BVSc
Hamish Moore	BVSc
Catherine Copland	BVM&S
Peter Heslip	BVSc, MVM
Annie Jackson	BVSc
Steven Butler	BVSc
Ruth Andrews	BVSc
Anna Burrell	BVSc
Erin Caswell	BVetMed
Andrew Comerford	MVB
Andrew Roe	BVSc, MACVSc
Sam Howarth	BVSc

Milton Clinic

Peter Kalb	BVSc
Jillian Clark	BVSc
Sid Taylor	BVSc, MACVSc
Barbara Christensen	BVSc, MACVSc
Tom Wallbank	BVM&S
Martha O'Connor	MVB