



## Managing OJD: It's not hard to do and it makes good \$ense

Accurate and current information about ovine Johne's disease (OJD) for agents: for a healthy and wealthy sheep industry

OJD is an infectious wasting disease in sheep caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium paratuberculosis*. Over time, sheep continuously lose condition and eventually die, spreading the disease along the way. OJD is increasing in some states of Australia.

- OJD can kill up to 15—20 percent of sheep in unvaccinated, infected flocks.
- Ongoing mortality rates in flocks mean producers have fewer sheep to join and sell.
- Selling infected light-weight sheep bring less money.
- Profit losses due to OJD can be significant in wool and prime lamb flocks:
  - wool flocks can lose up to 53c/DSE = \$5,300 per 10,000 DSE
  - prime lamb flocks can lose up to 98c/DSE = \$9,800 per 10,000 DSE. (source Pfizer Animal Health)

But good management practices are proving enormously effective in combating the disease in other parts of the country.

### How does the disease spread?

The most common means of spread is through purchasing OJD infected sheep. Although infected sheep can look healthy, they can already be spreading the bacteria and contaminating pastures and any flocks they run with. When the disease is well established in a district, lateral spread from property to property also occurs.

**There is no cure for OJD, so prevention or vaccination are currently the only methods of control.**

### How can sheep producers stop OJD on their farms?

Currently there is no treatment for OJD. The best way to combat the disease is through a combination of effective preventative actions, such as vaccination, grazing management practices, abattoir surveillance and using Sheep Health Statements when buying and selling stock.

### Why should sheep producers vaccinate their flocks?

OJD is a highly infectious and insidious disease. Because it takes a long time for the disease to develop from the point-of-infection to clinical expression, producers often continue buying and selling stock without realising their flocks are contaminated. As the disease also tends to be found in *clusters of farms*, the risk of infection greatly increases if a neighbouring property, or a property within a district, is found to be contaminated.

Vaccinating flocks with *Gudair* is currently the most cost-effective way to reduce and help prevent OJD-related deaths.

- Sheep require a once-off dose of the vaccine.
- Government vaccine subsidies are available in certain states.
- Vaccinate lambs between the ages of 4—16 weeks to be approved vaccinates.
- Vaccinating all replacement stock will help protect the existing flock and minimise pasture contamination.
- Vaccination increases trading options, as shown in South Australia where vaccinated ewes trade at a premium in the market.

### As a stock agent, what can I do to help prevent the spread of OJD?

- Advise clients to buy sheep rated at higher ABC scores than their own homebred flocks.
- Encourage clients in districts known to be OJD infected to vaccinate their flocks.
- Advise clients to use Sheep Health Statements when buying and selling.
- Pass on up-to-date and accurate OJD information to clients and other industry people.

See [www.ojd.com.au](http://www.ojd.com.au) for all your ovine Johne's disease information and biosecurity measures.