

JD NEWS

Official Newsletter of the National Johne's Disease Control Program

Winter 2010



Producer rewarded for biosecurity

Lynne and Michael Strong were recently announced as the winners of the prestigious National Landcare Woolworths Primary Producer of the Year. They own and manage the highly successful Clover Hill Dairies located on the New South Wales southern coast.

Clover Hill's mission is to strive to adopt a holistic decision-making process to ensure higher quality of life for both themselves and their livestock, financial stability, the highest levels of animal stewardship and the confidence of knowing that their decisions are improving the environment and the community they live in.

It is no surprise that the Strongs see the Johne's Disease Market Assurance Program (MAP) as an effective business management tool for risk based trading, with their continued focus on managing their property and business.

Lynne and Michael have been part of the MAP from the day the program was first established. Their decision to join the program followed a previous bad experience, after inadvertently introducing another cattle disease, Enzootic Bovine Leucosis (EBL). To eradicate EBL, they had to cull the majority of their prize winning herd at well below their true value.

Since then they have made an ongoing commitment to never find themselves in that position again as a result of inadvertently introducing any disease.

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Photo: Brendan Stacpoole

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The Strongs see the benefits of being a part of the MAP as it is very important to prevent diseases like BJD for long term profitable farming and consumer confidence in the product. They firmly believe that taking precautions to prevent disease from coming onto your farm is the best investment you can make.



Photo: Lynne Strong

Vaccination the key to OJD management, an operational perspective

Farm biosecurity, using the National Sheep Health Statement, vaccination, record keeping, veterinary advice and abattoir surveillance, are the weapons of choice for sheep producers in preventing and controlling ovine Johne's disease (OJD) outbreaks on-farm.

OJD was first diagnosed in Australia in 1980, and spread rapidly across parts of New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia, infecting 200 farms by 1989. By December 2009, Victoria alone registered a total of 595 known infected flocks – demonstrating a disturbing 46 % increase in official numbers over the past five years. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

Hamilton farm management consultant and veterinarian, Graham Lean, said the increase in OJD throughout Victoria is very real, and suggests that for every farm that is identified as infected, four or five infected farms remain undetected.

"The problem with this disease is if people don't know they're infected, they don't vaccinate. So there's more and more contaminated farms that keep spreading the disease to other farms by the bucket load," Graham said.

Graham said the biggest hurdle is that often producers do not realise they are at risk of the disease, and are unaware of the mortality and economic losses they could be facing.

"We've seen losses up to 15 – 20 % a year. We've seen losses in very young stock on heavily contaminated farms, but on other farms we've seen very light losses", he said.

"It is an insidious disease, making it likely that there could probably be losses occurring that are larger than what people actually realise."

A 2005 research project funded by Meat & Livestock Australia studied 12 southern New South Wales sheep properties over one year. The study found that OJD-related death rates on individual properties ranged between 2.1 and 17.5 % each year, with an annual average death rate of 6.2 % of the adult flock. This more than doubles the accepted annual mortality rate of 2-3 %, arising from all causes of death, in Australian sheep flocks.

Graham said the most important thing producers can do to manage OJD is to vaccinate flocks with Gudair vaccine before significant deaths occur.

"Certainly our experience over the last 10 years or so with the disease would emphasise that this is absolutely the case. Often significant deaths aren't noticed because the disease presents itself in an insidious way. The light tail of the flock keeps dropping off and this tail keeps developing over time, and sheep die quite readily without farmers really noticing it. It is, on a whole, quite difficult to be aware that some significant losses are taking place," he said.

Photo: Graham Lean



As the disease tends to be found in clusters of farms, Graham recommends commencing a vaccination programme as soon as producers suspect their flocks are infected, or when they are aware of infected neighbouring properties or even properties in the same district.

“It takes a long time for the disease to develop from the point-of-infection to clinical expression. So if there are infected sheep farms nearby, then experience would tell us that other farms are susceptible,” he said.

The once-off vaccination works out to be a bit over \$2 per head (ex GST), with government subsidies available to producers who have received a positive OJD diagnosis.

“Victorian flocks can receive subsidies for one year of about 46 cents (ex GST) per sheep, for vaccinating the whole flock. The grant can also be accessed over three years for 93 cents per non-slaughter lamb (ex GST) when only the lambs are vaccinated. So, that’s quite attractive when someone’s initially vaccinating,” Graham said.

An economic analysis performed by Graham Lean and Associates (GLA) for Pfizer Australia, which was based on modelling real farm data from the GLA Farm Benchmarking database to work out the benefits of vaccination, found vaccination programmes to be a significant benefit to specialist wool and prime lamb flocks. The economic modelling is based upon the average farm benchmarking client (20,000 Dry Sheep Equivalent (DSE) in the GLA database.

“For specialist fine wool flocks, the improvement in profitability by vaccinating everything is nearly 60 cents per DSE, run over the whole flock. So if someone has nearly 20,000 DSE, their added profit by vaccinating is going to be about \$12,000. And that’s straight extra profit, without taking into account a premium for approved vaccinates for sale, and the time, stress and labour of cleaning up dead sheep.”

“It’s even higher in speciality prime lamb flocks, around \$1 per DSE, which would be nearly \$20,000 over a 20,000 DSE flock.”

“Clearly, it’s highly cost effective to vaccinate,” he said.

Graham agrees that abattoir surveillance is also a useful tool of defence for producers.

“It is fantastic on a regional level, but from a producer’s point-of-view, having access to abattoir surveillance can be very positive, because it can give them information on their disease status, not only on OJD, but a number of other diseases.”

Other important management practices urged by Graham include using Sheep Health Statements when purchasing and selling stock, and seeking assistance to help modify farm management to help alleviate the impact of the disease.

Graham said that even though there is no way of eradicating OJD, it can be successfully controlled by adopting a rigorous vaccination programme and good farm management practices.

“Unfortunately, there does appear to be some reluctance to vaccinate, given the numbers we’re seeing. It doesn’t make sense that there is reluctance – and I’m not quite sure why farmers aren’t vaccinating. I suspect they just don’t realise how much at-risk their farm is from significant losses.”



Photo: Graham Lean

BJD assistance extended

Earlier this year, Cattle Council of Australia (CCA) announced a three year extension to June 2013 of the Financial and Non-Financial Assistance Package (FNF Package) for beef herds affected by Johne’s disease.

The FNF Package is an initiative of the CCA that helps beef cattle producers whose herds are identified with, or suspected of being infected with bovine Johne’s disease (BJD) to eliminate the infection and resume normal trading.

The FNF Package provides a number of measures to eligible beef producers, including assistance for developing a property disease management plan, and destocking if this is required, and ongoing access to the services of a BJD counsellor.

BJD counsellor David Allan stated, “The package has been very well received and offers a constructive way forward for producers who have often been frustrated in their attempts to resolve the disease status of their herds”. He said, “In the majority of cases, as a result of accessing the package, these producers have returned to unrestricted trading and have had a much improved understanding of the risks to farm biosecurity through buying cattle without some form of vendor animal health assurance”.

Since its commencement in 2004, the FNF Package has provided assistance to 187 producers across all states of Australia. As a result of the FNF Package, 111 producers have had the Johne’s disease status of their herd and property improved, including five herds that have joined the Australian Johne’s Disease Market Assurance Program for Cattle (CattleMAP). Nationally, the number of known infected beef herds has dropped from 142 in 2004, to 52 in 2009.

CCA recognises the importance of ensuring the very low prevalence of BJD in the Australian beef herd.

Justin Toohey from the CCA said, “The continued very low prevalence of BJD in the Australian beef herd is well regarded internationally and continues to support the clean green image of Australian beef”.

Mr Toohey stated, “It is important to note that all cases are treated confidentially and I encourage all beef producers to contact the BJD counsellor for their state, if they suspect BJD is in their herd.”

More information about the FNF Package can be obtained from:

[www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/programs/jd/nbjdsp\\$/financial_assistance.cfm](http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/programs/jd/nbjdsp$/financial_assistance.cfm)

OJD Developments

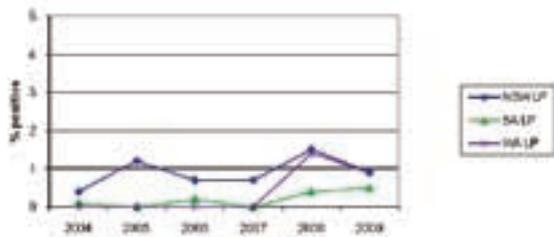
The prevalence area estimates for 2009 have shown that the prevalence of ovine Johne's disease (OJD) has continued to rise in some areas and has declined in others.

Based on these estimates, the South Australian and Queensland low prevalence area (LPA) remained below the 95% cut-off value of 0.8%, while New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria exceeded the cut-off to varying extents (1.4, 1.6 and 5.3 % respectively). For the medium prevalence areas, South Australia (5.2%) and Tasmania (4.2%) remained well below the cut-off of 12.5%, while New South Wales (42.7%) and Victoria (32.3%) exceeded it.

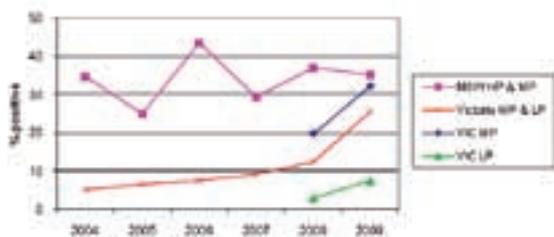
Data sets have been collected to enable trend lines to be established for different regions of Australia. Because prevalence area boundaries were re-set in March 2008, some of the data sets have been combined to include more than one prevalence area.

The graphs provided show that the prevalence of infected Property Identification Codes (PICs) is increasing most rapidly in Victoria and in the Medium Prevalence Area of NSW, where prevalence approaches that of the High Prevalence Area (HPA).

Percentage of positive PICs or lines for selected prevalence areas



Percentage of positive PICs or lines for selected prevalence areas



A notable exception to this trend towards increasing prevalence has been Kangaroo Island, where there has been widespread use of vaccine combined with a well developed understanding and implementation of farm biosecurity. Recent reports have indicated that the prevalence of OJD cases in the past seven years "has dropped from 15 % to about 4 % (abattoir surveillance estimate)" (PIRSA, 2010).

Producers are reminded of the benefits of taking a three way approach to managing this disease by:

- 1) vaccinating all home bred sheep
- 2) only buying sheep that come with a sheep health statement that shows they have a higher score than the flock which they are entering
- 3) using abattoir monitoring to measure the effectiveness of property control plans.

National Sheep Health Monitoring Project

The National Sheep Health Monitoring Project commenced in 2007 and monitors lines of adult sheep in abattoirs for a number of important animal health conditions that can cause loss of income on farm or wastage in meat processing plants.

The project has two aims: to collect information that can be used by producers, industry groups, processors and governments to support ongoing market access, and to provide animal health status reports to each individual producer.

To date, abattoir monitoring has generated a comprehensive and contemporary data set that provides a good indication of the animal health status of the Australian flock.

There are up to twenty different animal health conditions monitored throughout Australia including:

Liver fluke (*F.hepatica*)



Sheep measles (*C.ovis*)



Cheesy gland (*C. pseudotuberculosis*)



Hydatids (*E.granulosus*)



Photos: Wayne Gilbert

All monitored conditions can cause on-farm losses and have the potential to affect market access if they are found in export meat shipments. Although meat inspection is effective in minimising this risk, the presence of these conditions is causing a loss of product in the red meat supply chain, and both producers and processors are losing money as a result of this. This loss is avoidable.

The monitoring occurs nationally at several meat processing plants and is conducted in parallel with abattoir monitoring for OJD. The information provided to individual producers can assist them to improve their flocks productiveness and fine tune animal health programs. To date, reports have only been returned to producers in New South Wales and South Australia through the departments of primary industries.

If producers are aware that the conditions are occurring in their flocks, they can be more vigilant in preventing them on-farm and reducing losses.

Through working with the farmers, the processors may begin to see a rise in productivity and a reduction of product non-compliance and costs.

The animal health conditions identified through monitoring occur nationally but there is regional variation. Using the project data set, the percentage of affected lines for some conditions is high, but the average number of sheep infected within a line is quite low.

A recent report commissioned by Cattle Council of Australia, Sheepmeat Council of Australia, WoolProducers Australia, Goat Industry Council of Australia and Australian Meat Industry Council, has confirmed the benefit to the whole supply chain of information collected during abattoir monitoring.

The current project will continue for another two years, and stakeholders will be working to determine whether a long-term sustainable model for the return of feedback to producers can be developed.

For more information about this project contact:

Sheepmeat Council of Australia 02 6273 3088

WoolProducers Australia 02 6273 2531

Animal Health Australia 02 6203 3922

OJD Assurance Credits and Abattoir Surveillance

Ian Links, Biosecurity Special Projects Officer, Industry and Investment NSW (I&I NSW), advises that more than 730 sheep producers across NSW recently received notification by mail that abattoir monitoring of lines of sheep from their flocks had shown no evidence of ovine Johne's disease in their sheep at slaughter.

As part of the National Sheep Health Monitoring Program, funded by WoolProducers Australia and Sheepmeat Council of Australia, consignments of sheep over two years of age are monitored for sub-clinical OJD in export abattoirs across Australia. Property Identification Codes (PICs) are used to identify the property of origin for direct consignments.

I&I NSW reports details of individual consignments positive for OJD to District Veterinarians. They are then in a position to discuss on-farm control strategies, particularly vaccination, in newly detected flocks and to review the effectiveness in known infected flocks. This is a very effective targeted communications program.

OJD negative monitoring reports are mailed directly to producers on a quarterly basis, and district veterinarians are provided with details of negative consignments on request. The reports for the first quarter of 2010 relate to the monitoring of 1058 consignments from 730 properties, with the viscera from 248,300 sheep individually inspected. Reports are provided to the owners of all negative lines, where more than 25 sheep that have been inspected.

Producers can utilise the negative monitoring to gain extra ABC Points on the National Sheep Health Statement, <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/health/specific/sheep/ojd/movement/shs>

This enhances the trading opportunities for producers by promoting the sale of lower risk sheep, particularly producers with known infected flocks or those in the High or Medium Prevalence Areas. It also underpins the validity of the OJD Prevalence Areas, reassuring producers in the Low Prevalence Area that their status is worthwhile protecting, and facilitating interstate trade to Queensland.

Identification of consignments and reporting has only been possible due to the progressive implementation of accurate traceability through the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS).

Prepared by Ian Links, Biosecurity Special Projects Officer



MAP Updates

AlpacaMAP

The Pooled Faecal Culture (PFC) test has been approved for use in alpaca herds for the purposes of herd testing for AlpacaMAP and also disease investigation and control for BJD.

The protocol will run in line with that for cattle, where samples from five alpaca are pooled in one test thus providing a significant cost saving for breeders undergoing faecal testing for BJD.

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The AlpacaMAP manual is currently being amended to include PFC as an alternative testing protocol.

GoatMAP

The GoatMAP manual has been recently updated. The manual is available as an electronic document from the Animal Health Australia website.

The latest version contains updates relating to the use of the PFC test, and vaccination in goat flocks.

To order a CD version of GoatMAP, download the MAP manual order form at [http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/programs/jd/maps\\$/goatmap.cfm](http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/programs/jd/maps$/goatmap.cfm).

The Goat Shows, Sale and Exhibition Certificate of Compliance, the Goat Show and Sale Health Declaration or Agreement between Herd Owner and Approved Veterinarian and all other associated forms please visit the website: <http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au/farm-biosecurity/toolkit.cfm>

Snippets

Meat Profit Day

Animal Health Australia (AHA), Cattle Council of Australia (CCA) and Sheepmeat Council of Australia (SCA) shared a trade display booth at Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA)'s Southern Meat Profit Day (MPD) on 31 April in Melbourne. Kelly Wall represented AHA, Heidi Dennis represented CCA and SCA and David Allan was there to consult on matters concerning BJD. Meat Profit Day is regarded as an important opportunity for farming businesses to hear from leading industry speakers from all around Australia.

With over 400 participants, including producers, industry leaders, researchers and 60 agriculture students, there was ample opportunity to engage with relevant stakeholders on livestock health and welfare issues.

Johne's disease update at Pan Pacific Veterinary Conference

Dr Lorna Citer and Dr David Kennedy, from AHA, discussed industry biosecurity measures for Australian farms at the Pan Pacific Veterinary Conference in May. They suggested using simple risk management and biosecurity practices to minimise the risk of getting it, and in aiding its control.

"The benefits of taking a proactive approach using simple biosecurity measures are now being recognised," said Dr Citer. "Veterinarians have a pivotal role as community leaders in promoting the benefits of animal health statements, like the National Sheep Health Statement and other biosecurity tools that provide information about health status," she said.

Dr Kennedy also said that "individual farm biosecurity plans can assist producers to build a solid foundation for minimising disease risks. The plans are applicable to existing production diseases as well as emergency conditions such as foot and mouth disease."

Simple biosecurity practices can reduce the costs of on farm control of Johne's disease and provide an effective alternative to the traditional regulatory approach. The world has moved on from a regulatory approach to endemic disease control and Australian farmers stand to benefit by embracing a biosecurity approach.

For more information and biosecurity tools, visit the Farm Biosecurity website: <http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au/toolkit.cfm>

Global Biosecurity 2010

In early March, several AHA staff members attended *Global Biosecurity 2010: safeguarding agriculture and the environment*, in Brisbane. The conference attracted 450 delegates, including representatives from biosecurity agencies, research organisations, agricultural industries, environmental organisations, and a number of international agencies.

Dr Lorna Citer, Manager Endemic Diseases and Mr Steve Roots, President of Goat Industry Council of Australia gave a presentation about the National Goat Health Statement, highlighting AHA's work with industry and government to coordinate national initiatives and the benefits of using the statement as part of a comprehensive biosecurity plan.

In collaboration with Plant Health Australia, AHA jointly hosted a Farm Biosecurity booth which showcased the program and the messages produced to raise producer awareness of on farm biosecurity practices.

Did you know...

Between June and December 2009, 738,145 sheep in 3,309 lines were monitored for OJD and a range of other conditions. Results of the monitoring can be made available to the owner of the PIC identified on the National Vendor Declaration (NVD) at the time of sale.

To obtain a sheep health status report, and for more details, please contact your OJD coordinator.

Biosecurity Best Practice Management Guidelines for Agents

The Australian Livestock and Property Agents Association (ALPA) has recently released Biosecurity Best Practice Guidelines for agents which includes a recommendation for the provision of animal health statements for all lots offered for sale.

Visit <http://www.alpa.net.au> for more information.

Biosecurity Farmer of the Year

The Farm Biosecurity program is sponsoring a biosecurity award with Biosecurity Farmer of the Year featuring as part of the Kondinin Group/ABC Rural Australian Farmer of the Year Awards.

Nominations are now open and coverage is expected to gather pace with regular announcements on radio through ABC Rural and with Kondinin Group managing print media. The Awards Program provides a low cost vehicle to profile the practices and benefits of on-farm biosecurity and to recognise the great and innovative work of producers around the country.

Australian Farm of the Year Awards are open to all Australian farmers.

Nominations close Wednesday 18 August 2010.

More information is available through the Farmer of the Year website:

<http://www2.kondinin.com.au/Awards/AwardNominations.aspx>

JOHNE'S DISEASE & MAP STATISTICS



Photos left to right: Katie Austin, Kylie Knight

Number of known infected herds and flocks March 2010

Source: JD01 NAHIS

CATTLE

Number of known infected cattle herds.

	Dec 08	Dec 09	March 10
NSW	110	114	117
SA	67	59	60
TAS	16	16	16
VIC	884	964	964
WA	0	0	0
TOTAL	1077	1153	1157

SHEEP

Number of known infected sheep flocks.

	Dec 08	Dec 09	March 10
NSW	1286	1286	1286
SA	57	50	48
TAS	64	64	64
VIC	533	595	600
WA	24	31	36
TOTAL	1964	2026	2034

GOATS

Number of known infected goat herds.

	Dec 08	Dec 09	March 10
NSW	8	8	8
SA	1	1	1
TAS	3	3	3
VIC	4	10	11
WA	0	0	0
TOTAL	16	22	23

DEER

Number of known infected deer herds.

	Dec 08	Dec 09	March 10
NSW	1	1	1
SA	1	1	1
TAS	0	0	0
VIC	2	4	4
WA	0	0	0
TOTAL	4	6	6

Number of assessed herds and flocks in MAPS as of June 2010

Alpaca	MN1	MN2	MN3	Total
NSW	3	21	67	91
Qld	0	0	0	0
SA	0	2	13	15
Tas	0	0	2	2
Vic	2	3	2	7
TOTAL	5	26	84	115

Cattle	MN1	MN2	MN3	Total
NSW	79	104	136	319
Qld	0	0	0	0
SA	35	79	93	207
Tas	14	33	22	69
Vic	54	69	83	206
TOTAL	182	285	334	801

Goat	MN1	MN2	MN3	Total
NSW	12	10	5	27
Qld	0	0	0	0
SA	2	4	4	10
Tas	5	2	1	8
Vic	2	0	1	3
TOTAL	21	16	11	48

Sheep	MN1	MN2	MN3	Total
NSW	30	38	143	211
Qld	0	1	0	1
SA	15	24	119	158
Tas	2	2	14	18
Vic	7	7	46	60
TOTAL	54	72	322	448

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