

For Immediate Release

More NSW brains needed for testing

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NSW sheep producers are encouraged to keep a close eye on their sheep flocks for any sign of the disease scrapie. Not only is being observant a good on-farm biosecurity practice, but could earn you money at the same time.

Thanks to funding from WoolProducers Australia and the Sheepmeat Council of Australia, an incentive payment of \$100 is available for producers who submit sheep brains for scrapie testing.

Animal Health Australia's (AHA) Biosecurity Officer, Dr Rob Barwell, said NSW sheep producers can play an important role in ensuring market access for Australia's livestock.

"The incentive is part of the National Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies Surveillance Program (NTSESP) managed by AHA. The NTSESP enables Australia to prove to our trading partners and the World Organisation for Animal Health that Australia is free from Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE), including scrapie in sheep.

"The *Bucks for Brains* program plays an important role in the collection of samples to test for the NTSESP. The incentive payment is designed to ensure that we continue to receive our quota of animals for testing and retain our scrapie free status.

"The program needs a minimum number of sheep brains from each state to be tested annually and currently we are low on NSW samples. Therefore, we are encouraging local producers to help us ensure we meet our target. The added bonus is that the free testing may help determine what condition is affecting the sheep," said Dr Barwell.

Eligible sheep must be examined by a veterinarian or government animal health officer and display scrapie-like signs. Scrapie is a degenerative disease that affects the nervous system of sheep and goats. Clinical signs can include behavioural changes, scratching or wool loss, stumbling and difficulty in walking. Sheep displaying these signs must be at least 18 months old and under five years of age to be eligible.

If you see any signs of the disease, contact your local vet or state government animal health officer.

AHA is a not-for-profit member-funded company which works to protect and improve animal health within Australia. It does this through its partnerships with industries and governments, which help keep Australia disease free, builds the sustainability of our livestock industries and promotes the humane use of animals for food, companionship, recreation and sport.

To learn more about AHA and the *Bucks for Brains* program, visit www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au

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