Hindlimb gait abnormalities in bulls in the Kimberley

- 60 bulls had been grazing sorghum for about 12 weeks when 15 bulls in the herd developed ataxia in their hindlimbs and were examined by a local veterinarian.
- Shortly before the ataxia developed, the sorghum had sprouted green shoots and a new type of silage was introduced into the diet.
- No other clinical abnormalities were recorded on examination other than the ataxia.
- The herd was moved off the sorghum and over the next four days the affected animals returned to normal.
- Sorghum and silage samples were submitted for laboratory testing. A differential diagnoses list for the bulls was formulated: nitrate/nitrite toxicosis; mycotoxicosis; botulism; and cyanide toxicosis.
- Testing was negative for the first three differentials. Toxic levels of cyanide were detected in the sorghum pasture but not the introduced silage.
- Shooting sorghum is high in cyanide and nitrates and hay prepared from such crops can retain toxic levels. Advise producers to test any suspect home-grown fodder, hay or silage and to ask for a commodity vendor declaration when buying in feed to avoid toxicoses.

Deaths in Merino ewes in the South-West

- 100 four-year-old Merino ewes died on a South-West property with a total of a 1000 ewes.
- The ewes had been divided into three mobs and one mob recorded no deaths.
- The affected animals seemed disorientated, staggered and progressed to sternal recumbency and death. Some animals were scouring.
- Clinical examination revealed animals with pale mucous membranes and poor body scores. The animals had an uncertain worming history. One animal was post-mortemmed and a basic sample set was examined.
- Histopathology revealed an eosinophilic abomasitis and enteritis with mild neutrophilic hepatitis. Evidence of nematodes was seen in some slides.
- Biochemistry showed elevated liver enzymes and a marked hypoalbuminaemia and hypoproteinaemia.
- A high worm egg count was recorded with 93% of eggs identified as Haemonchus. Read more on Haemonchus.
- Testing of animals with nervous signs in the eligible age range is required to maintain Australia’s access to markets. Read more on the transmissible spongiform encephalitis (TSE) and the national testing program.

Ill-thrift, scouring and deaths in Merino ewes in the South-West

- Ill-thrift, scouring and deaths were seen in four-year-old Merino ewes, with 10 affected and six dead in a mob of 2000.
- The mob had been drenched approximately two months ago. One animal was post-mortemmed and a basic sample set was submitted with a provisional diagnosis of parasitism and/or trace element deficiency. In any differential diagnosis list, always consider reportable diseases that may present with similar clinical signs. Testing for reportable diseases supports WA’s livestock and livestock exports markets.)
- Histopathology revealed thickening of the lining of the small intestine due to infiltration of inflammatory cells and the Ziehl-Neelsen stain showed numerous acid-fast bacteria.
- Biochemistry revealed low albumin and total protein levels consistent with a history of chronic enteropathy. Worm egg counts were negative.
- Ovine Johne’s disease (OJD) was diagnosed, which was consistent with the clinical signs of weight loss and diarrhoea.
What happens when ovine Johne’s disease (OJD) is diagnosed on a WA property?
OJD may be diagnosed on a property as part of a disease investigation into ill-thrift and weight loss. In some cases a farmer may contact a vet for advice after a detection of OJD has been made as part of the industry-funded abattoir inspection program.

- In Western Australia, OJD is a reportable disease, but not regulated. Owners of infected properties are not placed into quarantine or required to destock.
- Since the disease is not regulated, owners are not compelled to do anything, however:
  - Owners should inform their neighbours so that they can make their own biosecurity arrangements.
  - Owners of infected properties should inform buyers of restocker sheep of their OJD status. The best tool to inform buyers is the National Sheep Health Statement: free downloadable PDFs are available at: Farm Biosecurity: Declarations and statements.
- There are no public health implications with OJD so trade of animals direct to slaughter can continue as normal.
- Animals sold through saleyards should be accompanied by an NSHS indicating ‘Slaughter only’.
- Vaccination is in most cases the best control option for an infected property, but grazing management and flock structure also play a part.
- The DAFWA website has comprehensive information on prevention and management of OJD.

In late spring to early summer, be on the lookout for:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Typical history and signs</th>
<th>Key diagnostic samples*</th>
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| **Thiamine deficiency induced polioencephalomalacia (PEM)** in sheep and cattle. | • Often associated with a change in feed composition, such as lush feed or supplementary grain.  
  • Sporadic outbreaks are seen in grazing stock. Larger outbreaks may occur in feedlots.  
  • Affected animals show blindness, head pressing, opisthotonus, seizures, death. | Live animals pre-treatment:  
  • 5mL blood per animal, in an EDTA tube (pink/purple cap), from affected and unaffected animals.  
  • Sample 5–10 animals.  
  Post-mortem:  
  • A basic sample set including fixed brain. |
| **Coccidiosis** in lambs.            | • Young or previously unexposed stock scouring 2–3 weeks after introduction to a contaminated environment.  
  • May occur in lambs when ewe milk production drops due to poor nutrition and/or lambs wean themselves early and graze contaminated pastures. | Faecal sample:  
  • Fresh faeces from the group of affected animals.  
  • Package 50g faeces separately for each animal (not pooled) and refrigerate at +4 to +8 degrees prior to shipment on ice. |
| **Lameness in sheep – rule out virulent footrot** | • The number of lame animals usually increases in warm, wet conditions.  
  • When investigating lame sheep, vets should check for signs of footrot and take samples if they suspect the disease is present.  
  • Bacterial culture is the only way to distinguish virulent footrot from benign footrot.  
  • **Virulent footrot is a reportable disease.**  
  **Note:** lameness in sheep may be the only sign they show of foot-and-mouth disease. Stay vigilant for signs of FMD. | Skin scrapes for culture:  
  • Perform skin scrapes between the digits of the affected hoof and submit to AHL for culture.  
  • See p35 AHL Service Manual for more details including suitable transport media to use.  
  • Practice strict biosecurity in order to avoid spreading the disease. |

Also include base samples and any clinical or gross lesions in submissions. For advice on sample submission, consult the AHL Service Manual or phone your local DAFWA veterinarian, or the duty pathologist on +61 (0)8 9368 3351.

We welcome your feedback. To provide comments or unsubscribe, email bruce.twentyman@agric.wa.gov.au.

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