

Strategies outlined to control OJD

By KANE CHATFIELD

VACCINATION combined with sound management and biosecurity measures is the best control option to combat the common condition of Erysipelas Arthritis and the now endemic Ovine Johne's Disease (OJD) in sheep.

This was the foundation of Zoetis northern area manager Gavin Craig's presentation at the Challara on-property open day.

The Erysipelas bacteria survives in the environment and the nasal passage of sheep and infection enters through the navel and open wounds of sheep commonly caused at birth, marking and shearing.

The infection spreads throughout the body and can localise in the joints which causes arthritis.

Mr Craig said Erysipelas was commonly seen on most farming properties with some worse than others.

"Ewes graze most of the year close to the ground and the bacteria enters the nasal passage and can harbour itself behind the tonsils," he said.

"The ewe licks a newborn lamb and can transfer the bacteria to the lamb through the freshly broken umbilical cord."

Mr Craig said producers will see the critical symptoms such as swollen joints, difficulty rising and walking in only two to three of cases where the bacteria has localised in the joints.

"If you see a few cases like this, it's a good indication you have bacteria in your soil and it's not going to go away and in certain years it will only build up and get worse," he said.

"Commonly the animal gets a fever for 2-3 weeks during the early stages and get over it.

"If it is a week-old lamb and gets a fever for two to three weeks, they are most susceptible to mis-mothering, stunted growth and predators."

Mr Craig said the highest risk was between birth and marking time and lambs that are not protected by maternal antibodies

are at most risk.

"The common practice of one vaccination shot to the lamb at marking isn't fully effective for adequate immunity," Mr Craig said.

"It takes the lamb seven to eight days to build an antibody response for protection during the high risk period from birth to post marking.

"If the ewe is carrying maternal antibodies with a booster shot six to eight weeks prior to lambing, the lamb will obtain antibodies through the colostrum and get coverage for up to 10 to 12 weeks depending on marking time.

"And another shot at marking time works more like a booster for the lamb."

Mr Craig said the advantages of the full program are higher weaning percentages and weights, minimal saleyard discounts and abattoir condemnations.

"I'm not aware of any producers that have implemented the program and have ceased it," he said.

Mr Craig then turned his attention to the endemic OJD that is a concern to all Australian sheep producers.

OJD is a bacterial disease with no known cure that causes weight loss and mortalities and is spread by the oral-faecal route, similar to worms.

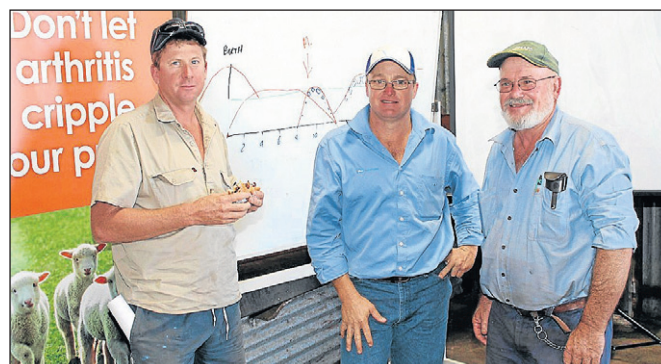
The bacteria can survive in the environment for up to two years making it difficult to detect and manage.

It is usually introduced to a property by purchasing infected sheep and other causes such as stray stock, water courses and trucking.

Mr Craig said there was a vaccine tool available but biosecurity was paramount to manage OJD.

"Get a check list together to see if you're at risk and need to rethink your property's biosecurity," he said.

Following the animal's exposure to OJD, there is a nine-month incubation period before the animal will shed the bacteria for anywhere up to five years before they get to the



Sheep producers Glen Wilkinson (left), Badgingarra, and George Large (right), Dandaragan, discuss vaccination options with Zoetis northern area manager Gavin Craig, who was a guest speaker at the Challara stud's on-property open day at Badgingarra last week.

clinical stage and waste and die.

When the animal picks up the bacteria, it absorbs it through the small intestine and the bacteria will build up and hardens the small intestine, stopping the animal from being able to absorb any food or water.

Mr Craig said sheep producers won't see 500 sheep dead in the paddock but a mortality rate of about 15 per cent over the year, despite the sheep having been drenched and having feed on hand.

"Tests to detect the disease include pool foetal egg counts which take about three to four months to get results back due to the slow growing bacteria and abattoir surveillance of aged animals where they will inspect the small intestine," he said.

Mr Craig said some control options include minimising contact with straying and neighbours sheep, grazing management to reduce pasture contamination, purchasing sheep with ABC point equal or higher

to your own flock and vaccinate all stock you intend to keep past 12 months of age.

"Many WA properties will remain undiagnosed and producers trading sheep must be careful about introducing infected stock," he said.

"Without control programs in place, the problem is only going to get worse."

Mr Craig said the vaccine was 1ml dose of killed vaccine which covered them for life and administered before 16 weeks of age to be an approved vaccinee.

He said the vaccine's benefits include reducing shedding and mortalities by 90pc and is to be used in conjunction with an OJD biosecurity management plan.

"The vaccine does not eradicate OJD from the property or prevents the introduction of the disease," he said.

"But it opens up trading options for producers while protecting a farmer's own property."

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