

Sheep & Beef Talk

July 2017



Grass Staggers:

Hypomagnesaemia; more commonly known as grass staggers is a well recognised metabolic disorder mostly seen in cattle around calving time. However, a recent outbreak in the western region of the North Island - the King Country, was a good reminder that it can be an issue year round.

Grass staggers occurs when daily dietary intakes of magnesium are insufficient to meet metabolic needs. Cows cannot access the magnesium stored in their bones so they have to get enough in the diet every day. A period of reduced feed intake due to cattle being in the yards for an extended period of time, transport or even poor weather can be enough to cause an outbreak.

In the King Country outbreak we saw cattle kept in the yards over weaning for extended periods of



time, scanning and TB testing, in combination with poor weather resulted in the loss of nine breeding cows due to grass staggers. Ten blood samples were taken from the rest of the 300 beef cow herd. The results showed that the majority of the remaining cows were also dangerously low in magnesium.

Treatment for grass staggers is aimed at returning blood magnesium levels back to normal and increasing daily magnesium intake. In this case cows were returned to good pasture, and silage dusted with magnesium oxide powder was fed out. If doing this you need to ensure you are spreading enough powder – at least 50g of mag oxide per cow per day. It is also important to use some water to help the mag oxide stick to the silage/hay.

Individual down cows have a poor prognosis but should be given a mixed metabolic bag (calcium and magnesium) into the vein with an additional magnesium sulphate bag given under the skin. **Do not** give 20% magnesium sulphate into the vein as it will cause a heart attack.

This is a timely reminder for farmers currently holding beef cows in the yards for weaning, scanning, TB testing and other reasons to be aware of the risk. Have some silage or hay available if cattle are going to be off grass for an extended period, and have some metabolic bags on hand at all times of

In this issue

- Grass Staggers
- Prelamb
- Foot & Mouth Disease
- Product Update

Sheep Reminders

- Order pre-lamb products
- Draft out and lift condition in ewes below BCS 3
- Talk to us about lice treatment off-shears

Cattle & Deer Reminders

- Book in any remaining pregnancy testing
- Check copper levels with liver biopsies
- Get your deer TB testing booked in
- Talk to us about your deer shed and the changes for this coming velvetting season

Continued on the next page...

Continued...

the year in case of clinical cases.

A herd risk assessment can be done for your herd which involves assessing the animal risk – body condition and blood testing for magnesium levels, and assessment of feed intake and factors which

interfere with mag absorption in the rumen. Ideally this assessment should be made 4-5 weeks pre calving when the magnesium requirements are rising because of the onset of lactation. A plan can then be made to minimise the risk of grass staggers affecting your herd.

Prelamb 2017

With mating done and dusted we need to start thinking about all the bits and bobs we put into our sheep pre lamb!

Long-acting Drench Treatments:

Capsules or long-acting injections both have their place in our farming systems, but they must be used cautiously to ensure that we find the balance between productivity, profitability and sustainability. By sustainability we mean finding a drench option which reduces the development of resistant parasites on your property and means we can continue to use these drench families well into the future. All long-acting drench treatments pose a risk of developing resistance, so we recommend getting advice first from one of the team at your local VetEnt clinic.

There is variable response to capsule treatment in ewes, this is due to the variation in the stock we put them into. This supports the recommendation that you need to be selective with which animals you put capsules into, so that you see profitable returns. For example a body condition score 3+ mixed-age ewe carrying a single lamb is unlikely to need a helping hand over lambing, however a twin bearing hogget will probably become susceptible to a worm-burden and use of a long acting product will help her to achieve good levels of production. Here are some important take-home messages to do with long acting drenches:

1. **Be selective:** only put long acting treatments into animals that “need a hand”, they may not be profitable otherwise.
2. Using a primer with a Bionic capsule will **not** change the rate of reinfection with worms.
3. If using a single-active long acting product, or you have known resistance to an active in a Bionic capsule it is recommended that you EXIT drench at tailing.

4. Faeces from **any** animals treated with long acting products

should have a faecal egg count done at 60-70 days to look for any break through worm burden. This may indicate the need to EXIT drench. VetEnt clinics offer this service **free of charge** for any long-acting product purchased.

5. Get a FECRT done in the summer/autumn so we know the drench status of your property. This year's FECRTs shows a wide variety of results. Some farms are operating with good drench efficacy across all drench families whereas others have been highlighted as having a production limiting level of resistance to one or more drench families. This information is highly valuable to these farmers allowing them to make informed decisions for this season's pre lamb treatment.

5-in-1 Vaccines:

There are several products available which offer 5-in-1 clostridial vaccination, these are:

- **Ultravac:** 12 weeks post-injection protection period
- **Multine:** 12 weeks post-injection protection period
- **Nilvax:** 16 weeks post-injection protection period + levamisole drench
- **EweGuard:** 12 weeks post-injection protection period + moxidectin drench
- **Glanvac:** 12 weeks post-injection protection period + CLA (cheesy gland) protection

There are certain situations where one of these products may be more suitable in your ewe flock than the others.

Multine produces a higher level of protective antibodies in the ewes colostrum than the Ultravac. This is very important in flocks with a high number of triplet bearing ewes (one set of colostrum antibodies has to be shared between three lambs), or in flocks where we see losses from pulpy kidney in lambs between tailing and weaning. These are generally farms that put ewes and lambs onto very high quality feed during this period, and that have lambs genetically primed to put on very high weight gains. On these farms it is also important to consider

Continued on the next page...



Continued...

giving the lambs their first 5-in-1 vaccine at tailing rather than weaning as the challenge period occurs earlier (they will then get their booster vaccination at weaning.)

Nilvax is a great product if you do your pre-lamb vaccinating a little further out from lambing as this gives you an extra four weeks protective period for your lambs. This is due to the levamisole providing an immunity boost and giving a better response to the vaccine. This also increases the amount of ewes that get a full antibody response to the vaccine. Most vaccines are 80% effective whereas with the addition of levamisole this bumps the effectiveness up to 99.9%. In the high challenge situations described in the paragraph above, Nilvax may provide you with a long enough protection period to get away with not vaccinating lambs at tailing.

Iodine

Trace elements are crucial at this time of year. Iodine should have been

given already if ewes are on brassicas to prevent goitre in their lambs, however, this may have been given in an oral drench form which will have worn off by lambing. Iodine given pre-lamb has been associated with increased lamb vigour at birth. It is a newborn lamb's "wigglyness" that drives the maternal bond with the ewe – so we want lambs that are born vigorous and wiggly as this has a great impact on lamb survival!

You can either oral drench ewes pre-lamb with an iodine product, of which there are several options. Alternatively, giving a Flexidine injection now will provide adequate iodine through until lambing and also protect the lambs of any ewes on brassica crops from goitre.

We realise this is only the tip of the iceberg regarding pre-lamb products so we understand that there may be many of you with questions around this topic. Please don't hesitate to give us a call at any of our VetEnt clinics – we will work with you to provide the best solution for you and your property.

Foot & Mouth Disease

Tammy Wilson, VetEnt Riverside

In May this year I was one of 10 vets from across New Zealand sponsored by MPI to attend a real-time foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) training course in Nepal. The course was run by the European commission for the control of Foot-and-Mouth disease sanctioned by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The aim of the course was to provide hands-on experience to appropriate professionals to increase the likelihood of early detection and increase the country's biosecurity response capability should FMD ever gain entry to NZ.

During the intensive week long course we spent some long days in the classroom, long days in Jeeps being bounced around the country side and

had some very entertaining, slow moving conversations with local farmers. We were probably unsuspecting participants in political rallies at various times (as May marked the first local elections held in Nepal for 20 years) and at the end of the week we presented our findings to the Nepali government department for livestock services.

The highlight was visiting a real-time foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in a village located just out of Bharatpur, 140km west of Kathmandu valley. We interviewed farmers, examined animals including goats, cattle and buffalo, provided veterinary care and collected samples for testing. Over a dozen foreigners invading the village in a convoy of UN Jeeps, donning our plastic suits and boots (in 35°C heat) and fussing over their animals was very entertaining for the local children who followed us around all afternoon laughing at the "sweaty foreigners" and eagerly held torches for us as we finished up in the dark.

A typical farm in Nepal consists of two to seven dairy cows and or buffalo who are milked one to two times a day producing anywhere between 7 and 14L milk (apparently there are a lot of kiwi-cross genetics in Nepal). The milk is then taken to the local distributor (up the road) who buys the milk for 70R (about \$1 NZD) and sells it on for 75-80R or it is made into and sold as cheese. 70% of farmers are women, who walk their animals to communal grazing during the day and return to their shelters in the evening or feed is harvested and carried back to the shady sheds on their back. Often you would see monstrous stacks of green feed with a tiny pair of feet protruding from the bottom shuffling down the road.



Shared grazing on a Nepalese farm

Continued on the next page...



Nepal being a Hindu country it's illegal to kill a cow/eat beef so I asked a farmer what happens to the bobby calves, he laughed as the question was translated and responded by pointing to an unusually docile bull standing motionless in the middle of the street. Not only are these unowned animals a traffic hazard but a vector for disease as they are unchecked, and often not vaccinated roaming the neighbourhoods.

During an outbreak of FMD in the area farmers reported a loss of milk production by up to 80% and affected animals that recover often abort. They spend time nursing the animals and treatment costs are perceived to be very high. Vaccination is available however, there are several strains of the virus and cross protection doesn't occur. Two doses of vaccination initially and then a booster every six months is required to provide adequate protection but only one farmer out of 50 we interviewed practiced this (incidentally he said vaccination was great). Other farmers believed the vaccine to be unavailable, expensive

and ineffective and could cause mastitis.

There are many obstacles to control FMD in Nepal including cultural aspects, feeding practices (shared grazing), no traceability program, land borders and poor dissemination of good information about the disease. Agriculture contributes 12% to the national GDP and is an important sector for employment and poverty reduction. Nepal have engaged in the first phase of a national FMD control scheme which is a step towards eradication.

New Zealand is free from FMD and our export trade agreements rely on us maintaining that freedom. Early recognition is the key to minimising the impact an outbreak will have on our economy. It's important farmers and vets are aware of the signs and do not shy away from reporting any unusual or suspicious cases to their vets or MPI as soon as possible.

Signs of FMD include:

- Sudden drop in milk production
- Dull/depressed
- Loss of appetite
- Drooling
- Erosions in the mouth, on the teats and between the claws
- Lameness (looks a lot like footrot)
- High temperature
- +/- multiple cows affected

The number to report exotic disease to MPI is 0800 80 99 66.

Product Update:

Zoetis have informed us of some changes to their product list:

1. Startect (combination sheep drench containing derquantel and abamectin)

Startect will be discontinued once current stocks have been sold. This means that going forward, our recommended product for exit drenching (e.g. after the Barbers Pole season or for ewes that have had capsules) and quarantine drenching for all new sheep is Zolvix Plus. Zolvix Plus contains monepantel and abamectin. Studies show 100% kills of multiple drench resistant worms in New Zealand trials. We are finding more cases of triple-combination resistant worms around the country so a tight quarantine procedure using Zolvix Plus is a must. Now that Zolvix Plus is the only "new" active it becomes even more important to use it responsibly and retain its ability to deal with multi-resistant worms for as long as possible.

2. Vetdectin (single active moxidectin oral sheep drench)

Vetdectin will be discontinued once current stocks have been sold. Several alternative moxidectin products are available including Cydectin (Zoetis) and Exodus (Boehringer-Ingelheim, formally Merial Ancare). These remain our only option for prolonged Barbers Pole protection with a short meat withholding period for sale lambs. Drench resistance is becoming a serious issue with all moxidectin products.

3. Dectomax Pour-on (single active doramectin pour-on for cattle)

Dectomax pour-on will also be discontinued once current stocks have been sold. Dectomax injection will remain available. There are several alternative pour-on products available, including double combinations.