

APRIL 2018

VET NEWS

LAME COWS

ALPACA ECZEMA

DEER HEALTH REVIEWS



Some photos by Richard Hilson

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THE WELFARE OF THE LAME COW – SUMMER IS THE TIME TO THINK AHEAD

JOAO DIB

Lameness in dairy cows is a significant issue, impacting on animal welfare, production, reproduction and staff well-being. It is an ugly problem but there is lots that can be done to improve the situation and prevent problems.

Calving has long gone, mating is over and pregnancy testing results are already known to you. Hopefully, somatic cell count is under control and summer mastitis incidence is very low. If feeding has been done well, milk solid production per cow and per hectare has met your expectations and the cows are heading towards a condition score of 4.5 or so at dry off.

Most of you are well aware of the economic losses caused by lameness (drop in production, body condition score, impaired reproduction, staff time, treatment costs etc). The average NZ incidence for lameness is around 14% with best farmers achieving 8% or less. Help is necessary if you are above 20%.

To reduce the incidence of lameness and the impact it has on the animal, lame cows need to be drafted early and treated promptly. Missing prompt treatment has severe consequences: the septic invasion and destruction of the coffin joint (the joint that lies hidden with the hoof capsule) and in some cases the next joint up, the pastern joint leading to:

- Severe lameness, and non-weight bearing
- Rapid weight loss
- Drop in milk production
- Increased management burden
- Severe pain and welfare breakdown

Blown joints MUST be treated with a claw amputation as it is a severe animal welfare issue that overrides all other considerations.

Start Thinking Prevention Now

To reduce the incidence of lameness in the coming season:

- Consider the history of your herd
- Offer staff training in identification and treatment of lameness. We can help
- Survey your races and identify what needs to be done. Surface refurbishment, elimination congestion points, sharp corners etc. Consider Healthy Hoof advice
- Think about your milking shed approach, surface and presence of stones. What can be done to improve it?
- Treatment facility – restraint facility is essential and all farms must have them. The Whopper or Wrangler are good options. Install them and make sure there is good lighting and water handy.

The Future

The dairy industry has dealt with issues of mishandling of calves and is now having to deal with Mycoplasma — lameness is an old problem and very high on the list of seriousness. It has escaped the public eye, but maybe not for long. So let's work together to get the incidence of lame cows below 8% and the cases of severe septic joint to NIL!

We are here to help.

DEER HEALTH REVIEWS: A GOOD OPTION FOR DEER FARMS

RICHARD HILSON

Deer Industry NZ has put a lot of work into a great template for deer farmers and deer vets to initiate some thought around many aspects of deer health on individual deer farms. It has been a long time coming: some aspects of deer health are seen as "simple" issues but the complications of deer behaviour and social interactions mean that many deer farmers don't always see the other issues coming. A

simple management change may set off a devastating problem with weaner lameness, a simple "stress" can set off a myriad of diseases within a mob of deer, a poor call on buying in deer may introduce parapox or Johnes disease. It isn't hard to think of several good local examples, to be fair. With deer product prices at an all time high and presenting an opportunity for deer farmers and the deer industry to take advantage of these, good long term animal performance is really important.

The Deer Health Review is available online for you to download and consider (see the screen shot above, look for Deer Industry NZ's Deer Hub, Deer Health Review). The aim is to complete it with your vet. If you have a look you will see that there are topics that you will want some veterinary input on – it is possible to have a go yourself to get an animal health plan done but you will likely want some extra input.

It is comprehensive but not challenging. You consider some current performance and goals then work through a process



to consider many of the common and not-so-common deer issues. Having been involved in this project from near inception, it is interesting to see how the discussion evolves: by ensuring each topic is considered and the risks of the particular disease are all worked through, even if it isn't considered a real risk for the herd at present. Many animal health plans are about risk aversion and disease

avoidance so this is no different, but it forces the conversation, which is good.

Management is also considered. Deer health is often less about products and more about management – as recently domesticated animals (50 years in NZ, compared to 5000 years for sheep worldwide, for example), deer have some inherently tough characteristics that we can take advantage of with good management. Feeding is a big part of that and is well recognised in well-performed deer herds now. Getting day to day management right ensures good reproductive performance, good growth rates and good results.

Even if you have previously completed an animal health plan for your deer, we expect that you will find these reviews a useful step when you do the next update. Have a look and if a Deer Health Review piques your interest, please get in touch with one of our vets to sit down to take a look at what makes your deer farm tick.

FACIAL ECZEMA AND ALPACAS – SUMMER AND AUTUMN RISK

JOAO DIB

Alpacas are very susceptible to the toxic effects of facial eczema spores and high risk periods occur during the summer and autumn. The spores, produced by the fungus *Pithomyces chartarum*, are broken down in the digestive tract releasing the sporidesmin toxin. The toxin is absorbed into the circulation and reaches the liver where it is metabolised, releasing potent free radicals that damage liver cells. Once damaged, the liver irreversibly loses its full metabolic capacity. Consequently, noxious compounds accumulate in the blood stream. Photodynamic chemicals are some of the noxious compounds. They accumulate in the skin, react with UV light damaging blood vessels and skin cells hence the typical skin lesions seen. Additionally, in severe cases, complete liver failure and death are seen.

What are the signs of facial eczema in Alpacas?

The usual symptoms seen in other species affected with facial eczema include:

- Irritation
- Restlessness
- Skin swelling, crusting and oozing
- Decreased production/growth rates
- Abortion
- Death

Sudden death is the most common clinical sign seen. Alpacas are reasonably stoic animals and do not often show the subtle early signs that other species do until the liver damage is very severe. Diagnosis is obtained via blood sample and analysis of liver-specific enzymes such as GGT, or via post-mortem.

Preventing fungal growth and accumulation of spores is by far the most effective way to safeguard your animals against the disease. It is important to know that the key conditions favouring fungal growth are:

- Accumulated dead litter at the base of the sward, in summer/autumn
- Warm, moist conditions especially in north-facing slopes
- Grass base temperature greater than 10°C for more than 2-3 days and once produced, the spores remain a risk i.e. you have a contaminated pasture.

Useful prevention measures:

- Efficient pasture grazing, minimizing litter accumulation at

the base of the sward. Use other grazing species to graze excess pasture.

- If you are considering mowing pasture, think of a way to remove the dead matter.
- If you mow, but can not remove dead grass, use a set of chain harrows (a set of interlocked chains/metal spikes) to stir and expose the dead matter, hence minimizing fungal growth. Chain harrows come in all sizes and there will be one suitable for your property.
- Use fungicide sprays to prevent fungal growth. However, once the spores are present, spraying offers no protection.
- Identify higher risk paddocks, and monitor spore levels by carrying out spore counts and managing accordingly. We are producing a weekly electronic facial eczema bulletin, please contact the clinic if you are interested in subscribing to this at a cost of \$16.90 incl. GST.

To assist in the prevention of free-radical damage to the liver, the most practical and effective option is supplementation of 2g of elemental zinc per 100 kilo live weight per day. Start early, about 3 weeks before the danger period and carry out for approximately 100 days (this is a recommendation normally applicable to other ruminants but the time period in alpacas is not really known). The best response is achieved by mixing it with molasses and offering to the animals. Other options exist but are generally not as effective.

Treatment of affected animals

The damage to the liver is generally permanent but some degree of regeneration can occur. Animals showing symptoms need:

- shelter from sunlight, and darkness is best
- reduced protein feeds
- use protective, nourishing skin creams to soothe sensitive areas
- minimize stress by making water and feed easily accessible to the animal

Other treatments may be possible but will depend on age, condition and pregnancy status of animals.

In summary, manage your pastures adequately, start zinc supplementation early, be aware of the district spore count levels and contact us as soon as possible if you suspect any animal is affected.



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LUCY DOWSETT

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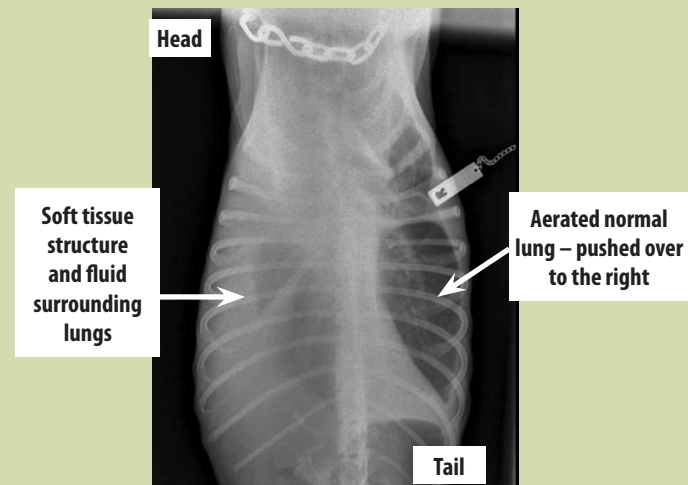
As I get further along in my career, I am starting to realise how tough some animals are. Right up there on the list, for me they are neck and neck, are cattle and dogs...far down the bottom there is the horse.

Common occurrences we have seen recently in clinic are dogs bought in that are "not working well" - we put them in a kennel, get some drugs and fluids ready, and when we go to get them end up dealing with the worst case scenario.

These animals don't complain, they will literally work until they drop dead so it's up to you, their owner, to identify when they are not right. For a dog, this may only be subtle like weight loss or not holding condition, they seem thirstier when at work, maybe they are a little sluggish running up the hills, or breathing a bit heavier than normal when resting. Knowing your dogs, and picking up on these small changes early on can make all the difference, or at least increase their chance of getting on top of a disease as early as possible.

For example, a recent case of mine – Huntaway, a rising 2 year old, thin dog but working hard, not showing much sign of lethargy, but in the last few days breathing got increasingly more laboured.

Radiographs were performed and show a large amount of fluid around the lungs in the chest. The lungs should be aerated so on xray, they appear black – fluid and soft tissue such as muscle like the heart and other solid structures appear grey, and bones are white. You can see in the xray, the edges of the lungs surrounded by the grey fluid or soft tissue density grey material.



This fluid in the lungs reduces the ability of the lungs to expand, (hence increased respiration rate) increases force of trying to breathe and reduces oxygen intake and therefore delivery to muscles.

We had to get the fluid off from around these lungs as the dog became progressively weaker and depressed as he was exhausted just trying to breathe.

We placed a chest drain through the ribs – this isn't a nice task!

This was successful and our diagnosis was reached – pyothorax (pus within the thorax). Over 1L of disgusting fluid was taken out of the chest via the drain– this fluid was brown/red liquid pus with massive amounts of yellow solid flecks through it – these are sulphur granules produced by Actinomyces bacteria...a bacteria which is commonly associated with these infections in working dogs...most commonly due to a migrated grass seed.



Despite continuing to drain over 1.5L of fluid the following day, 3 types of antibiotics, IV fluids, anti inflammatories and serious pain relief unfortunately this dog became septic and no amount of intervention was able to prevent the dog's death.

The owner was kind enough to allow us to do a post mortem to see if we could identify the source of the infection – and lo and behold – there was the seed.

Not only this but there was a huge amount of coagulated thick pus/blood clumps all throughout the chest – which no drain could have removed. This degree of infection would not have appeared within a few days, and as we often see in these cases, would likely have been developing over a few weeks.

The aim here is to raise awareness of how tough these animals are and what they will work through. If you have a dog that just seems a bit off, or maybe not holding condition as well as the others a quick consult may be worthwhile if we can pick something up early on, or even for peace of mind that your valuable dog has nothing sinister going on. We can advise what you might be able to change to see an improvement in their condition and performance.

It's heartbreaking for all parties seeing such a young and promising dog succumb to disease like this. Thank you so much to the owner of this dog for allowing me to share. It's not something we see very commonly and not many farmers would have experienced this, but it's one example of a number of these silent killers.



SEASONAL UPDATE

HASTINGS/NAPIER

CLARE RYAN

What a season! Grass is growing, beef and lamb prices look good, dairy payout has gone up, boomer apple crop, only downer is the grapes haven't liked the hot humid conditions!

Facial eczema counts are on the rise again in some areas with a few clinical cases being seen. We are continuing to monitor the grass spore counts on our monitor farms, with all results are posted on our website.

Cattle pregnancy testing is mostly done with overall good results. There is always evidence of bull failure so don't forget to test all bulls each year.

With ewe scanning just around the corner, you should have received your booking form. If you haven't please contact the clinic and we can send one out to you.

WAIPUKURAU

KATHRYN SIGVERTSEN

The weather is taking a turn towards winter – torrential rain and impressive thunderstorms as I write! Days are getting shorter and daylight saving snuck up on us yet again. Beef cow scanning is almost complete with mostly good results, generally results have been similar to previous years if not

slightly better. There is even some really early ewe scanning getting booked in. Spore counts are still being done, with occasional high counts, so don't stop being vigilant about this just yet, although the general trend is downward. Hopefully the cooler weather knocks the last of the spores right down.

DANNEVIRKE

SIMON MARSHALL

We have gone from amazing amounts of rain leading to flooding and slips to a reasonably prolonged period of warm dry weather. While this has been good for test match cricket it has also been good for our friends facial eczema, barbers pole, blow fly and grass staggers. We have seen and had a lot of reports coming through the clinic of those various diseases and others. The spore counts have remained high and clinical cases continue to be seen in sheep and dairy cattle. We have good products and advice to help prevent and try to treat this terrible disease.

We are hearing more about Mycoplasma bovis as time goes

on with the latest news being that the infected farms will be depopulated. This will be very distressing for all involved. The main message we have for prevention of this disease is around biosecurity. There are good tools to be found on this process on these website links:

<https://www.dairynz.co.nz/publications/farm/biosecurity-wof/>

<https://beeflambnz.com/compliance/biosecurity>

If you are planning on going for a hunt for a roaring stag please be safe and with duck shooting just around the corner take care on the ponds and dams also.

WAIRARAPA

STUART BRUERE

We have experienced exceptional grass growth over the late summer/autumn period. We should go into winter with good feed covers and farmers all in a more relaxed state of mind. Fly has been a major challenge on many farms, not the least the wee Aussie Green Fly, also travelling under the name *Lucilia cuprina*. These nasty flies can literally strike anywhere on the sheep and cause major fleece and skin damage to affected animals within 24 hours. Flystrike wounds are very serious and should be thought of as a very serious burn. It is extremely painful, which is why sheep lie about as they recover. If the winter remains warm, internal parasites will

continue enjoying their diet of animal protein in the form of gut lining and internal body fluids. Remember to plan to FEC sample your various mobs of ewes after tupping to ascertain worm burdens. We have a number of veterinarians in our group with expertise in worm management so please ask us about how we can help you and your sheep. By the time you read this, all the Aussie Cricket Ball jokes should have calmed down a bit and we will be thinking about the All Blacks and the French series in June. If history is to be repeated, it will be a "gnarly" series.

OUR VET TEAM

Napier & Hastings:

Clare Ryan, Dave Kruger, Dave Warburton, Georgina Campbell, Helen Crawford, Ian Leadbetter, Joao Dib, Mark Matthews, Neil Stuttle, Rachel Griffiths, Richard McKenzie, Roger McKinley, Sharné Boys, Stuart Badger, Veronika Pipe and Vicki Gilchrist.

Waipukurau:

Annelise Enslin, Anyika Scotland, Camille Flack, Caroline Robertson, Geert Gelling, Harry Whiteside, Kathryn Sigvertsen, Lucy Dowsett, Mike Fitzgerald, Nicolette Adamson and Richard Hilson.

Dannevirke:

Corinna Minko, Ingrid Meijer, Johnny Atkins, Kate Matthews, Naomi Barrett, Simon Marshall and Tim Hogan.

Masterton:

Elke Blommers, Jacques Van Zyl, Louisa Broughton, Nicola Haglund, Sandy Redden, Sara Sutherland, Sarah Wolland and Stuart Bruere.

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