NSW Agriculture

NSW Agriculture & Rural Lands Protection Boards

ANIMAL HEALTH SURVEILLANCE REPORT

March – April 1995

Contributions to this Report are warmly welcomed.
Please submit them as Wordperfect 5.1 documents on disk, by electronic mail or to the COMMON area on the Agnet computer, DEEP.

Livestock and Pastoral Conditions

North coastal areas received widespread heavy rain during March and pastoral conditions, water supplies and condition of stock improved greatly. However, this rain did not extend inland to any extent and the tablelands and the upper Hunter valley continued to deteriorate. Early grass growth has gone to seed without producing significant forage.

Extremely dry conditions during the period and cold weather in early April dashed hopes of a good autumn in central and southern parts of the State. At the end of April pastures were sparse and of low nutritive value. Supplementation with molasses and urea has recommenced in order to maximise the value in this feed. As good feed is becoming harder to procure, cheap roughages such as rice straw are being incorporated into feed mixes, with some impaction problems reported. Stock also moved out to northern NSW on agistment.

Disease Trends and Predictions

As expected weeds, plant poisonings and parasites followed the summer rains and added to the burden of drought. High titres to *Leptospira hardjo,* detected in several abortion investigations, are a reminder that this infection is widespread and may be introduced to breeding herds with restockers after the drought. Sporadic bovine encephalomyelitis (SBE) was also commonly diagnosed across inland NSW.

Parasites

Haemonchus infestation was common in weaners and hoggets in many districts. Variability in parasite burdens emphasised the need for close monitoring of flocks by faecal egg counts. In the Coonamble district 28 monitoring wormtests were sponsored by rural companies for their clients. Nearly half of these tests detected economically significant worm burdens, mostly *Haemonchus*.

To reduce the risk of haemonchosis next year in southern NSW, a wormtest is being recommended for October. If barbers pole is detected the first summer drench should comprise a closantel based product and a broad spectrum drench.

Poisonings
Plant poisonings were particularly common in inland NSW, often in hungry stock given access to weed infested paddocks or stubble regrowth after yarding. Primary and secondary photosensitisation, pyrrolizidine alkaloidosis, oxalate poisoning and hypocalcaemia, nitrate and prussic acid poisoning and bloat have been reported. Six of 120 cows died after grazing almost pure stands of flat billy button (*Ixolaenia brevicompta)* on a Walgett property. On the north coast a few cases of kikuyu poisoning were also encountered.

Urea poisoning in merino weaners caused moderate losses on a Hay district property. These sheep had access to drainage water from a rice crop.*(Contact: Ian Masters, Hay, 069–931 403)*

Footrot Progress
As expected, there has been little active footrot detected except in irrigation areas. Although the drought has prevented spread in most areas it has also delayed the inspections undertaken after transmission periods to declare previously infected flocks clean.

The greater part of the Dubbo district is to be declared a Footrot Control Area. This will greatly enhance footrot control in NSW as the major saleyards at Dubbo and Narromine will fall within the control area. *(Contact: Laurie Pryde, Dubbo, 068–811 275)*

Investigations of Suspected Exotic Diseases

Ostrich Fading Syndrome
An apparently new, ill–defined disease problem has emerged in ostriches in most States. Up to 90% of chicks in affected flocks have died of a wasting disease, characterised by diarrhoea, enteritis, immunosuppression and anaemia. Laboratory investigations have ruled out known avian diseases but have not found a definite cause. The isolation of type 1 paramyxoviruses from several flocks caused concern until it was confirmed that they were avirulent strains of Newcastle disease virus similar to those endemic in Australian poultry flocks. An apparent link with recent importations of ostriches from Canada and Zimbabwe via the Cocos Islands quarantine station has not been confirmed by epidemiological studies. Nutritional and management stressors are likely to be involved. National investigations, coordinated by the WA Department of Agriculture, continue. *(Contact: Ian Bell, Orange, 067–913 691).*

Significant Disease Events

Mouldy corn disease
Five horses died in recent months of acute leukoencephalomalacia on the Central Coast after eating corn containing the toxin fumonisin, produced by the fungus with *Fusarium moniliforme*. A range of corn products have been found to contain the toxin and horse owners have been cautioned about feeding corn. *(Contact: Greg Shanks, Maitland, 049–341 032).*

Ephemeral fever

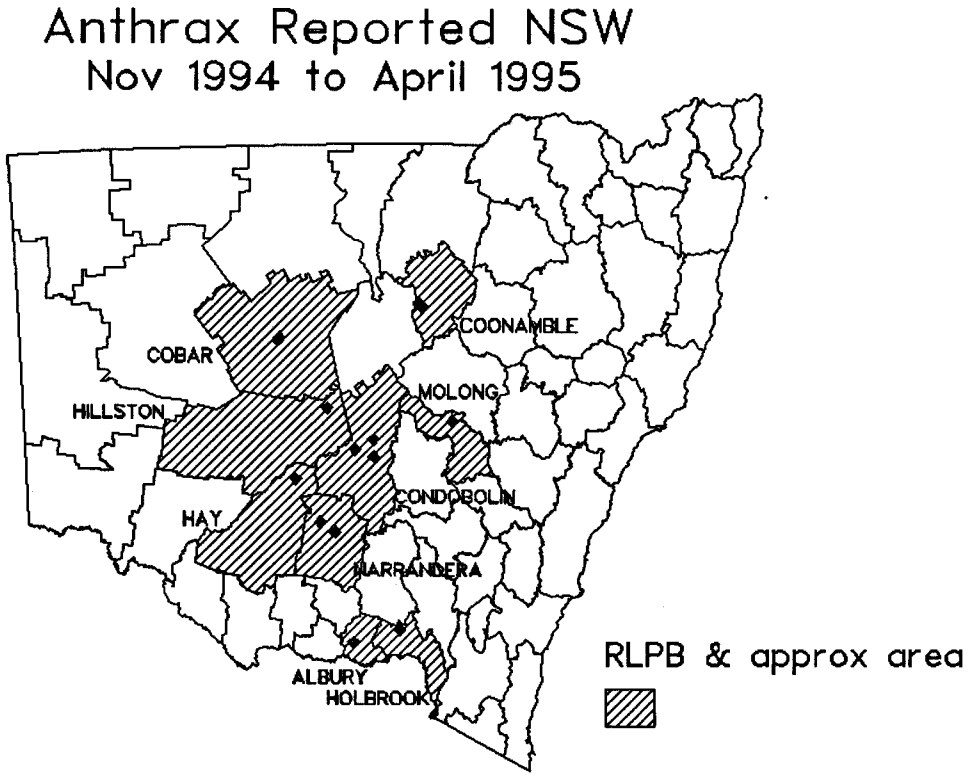
An isolated outbreak of ephemeral fever was confirmed in cows near Wee Waa in the Narrabri district in late March. A few herds were affected but there has not been any further spread reported. Serological investigations of a syndrome resembling ephemeral fever on the north coast has ruled out BEF virus infection as the cause and sentinel herds have not seroconverted. *(Contact: Shaun Slattery, Narrabri, 067–922 073)*

Anthrax

In recent years the average reported incidence of anthrax has been about 8 incidents per year. Between January and April this year, 11 separate incidents were confirmed with most occurring in areas recognised as the "anthrax belt". Three incidents involving cattle were diagnosed east of that area in localities where anthrax had not been reported for 30–50 years. The first, in the Holbrook district, was reported in the last AHS report. A second case involving 3 of 187 dry dairy cattle occurred north of Albury, and a third case was near Cumnock in the Molong district. Increased exposure of stock to soil in drought affected areas is supected to have been the main factor contributing to these incidents.

Despite alarmist media reports, all incidents were controlled by quarantine, decontamination and vaccination. Cyanamid–Websters and CSL have had good reserves of anthrax vaccine since mid–April. Vaccinated stock should be withheld from slaughter for 6 weeks to satisfy certain meat export certification requirements.

These incidents and those in Queensland and Western Australia in recent years are a reminder that anthrax can occur where it is not expected. Although it appears that the endemic area of NSW is still contracting, anthrax was once common over much of NSW. Veterinarians investigating sudden deaths in grazing stock should bear in mind that isolated incidents may occur from time to time outside the "anthrax belt". *(Contact: David Kennedy, Orange, 063–913 626).*



Disease Surveys and Studies

Akabane spread
Seroconversions to akabane virus have occurred in sentinel groups along the coast as far south as Bega, but have not moved inland. Warnings have been publicised that naive pregnant breeding females introduced from southern and inland areas to coastal NSW run the risk of being infected by akabane with resultant losses of their foetuses and calves later in the year. *(Contact: Peter Kirkland, Menangle, 046-293 333).*

National Granuloma Submission Program
All but one of the 50 granuloma submissions examined by RVL Orange and 60% of those examined at RVL Wollongbar during the period were confirmed to be actinobacillosis by histopathology or culture. No evidence of tuberculosis was detected.

Ovine Johnes Disease
Post importation quarantine on a sheep property in the Deniliquin district has been lifted following intensive serological testing for ovine Johne's disease since the arrival of the sheep from New Zealand in 1993. Sheep are being traced forward and will be monitored clinically for a further 2 years. *(Contact: Rob Walker, Wagga Wagga, 069-230 463).*

Ovine Johne's disease has been diagnosed on a total of 59 properties in NSW in the last 15 years. Most of these have been on the central tablelands but a small number of infected flocks have also been identified in recent years on the southern tablelands and slopes. Several of these properties have been destocked of sheep to control the problem. Although the tools available in Australia to reduce clinical disease, to detect the infection in live animals and to prevent it spreading, the Bathurst and Carcoar Rural Lands Protection Boards and the Department are developing control and prevention strategies for the sheep industry. Over 100 people attended a meeting called by NSW Farmers in Bathurst during March and the sheep industry sponsored a study tour to New Zealand by Laurie Denholm in April to investigate the problem there. *(Contact: Laurie Denholm, Orange, 063-913 863)*

Developments in Disease Recording and Reporting

Field Disease Recording
All district veterinarians in the Wagga region are submitting monthly disease reports. Some Boards are still experiencing problems in running *Fieldvet2* on networks, largely because of problems with paths and updating property records. Considerable effort has been devoted to overcoming these problems by SFVO's and by Board staff and their systems consultants.

A sheep lice recording and reporting sytem devceloped by George Perry at Walgett was trialled in Bourke at a workshop for new rangers. The system was well recieved and is being evaluated for inclusion in the *Fieldvet* system.

Laboratory Disease Recording
Labsys is providing good information on laboratory testing for management purposes but there has been a further delay in programming disease summary reports because of staff availability and competing demands on the available programmers. A work plan to have the required programming undertaken from June to September has been agreed with the department's Information Technology unit.

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