NSW Agriculture

NSW Agriculture & Rural Lands Protection Boards

ANIMAL HEALTH SURVEILLANCE REPORT

February 1995

Contributions to this Report are warmly welcomed.
Please submit them as Wordperfect 5 documents by electronic mail, on disk or to the COMMON area on the Agnet computer, DEEP.

Livestock and Pastoral Conditions

The rain that lifted spirits as well as feed and water supplies across much of NSW during December and January has been replaced by warm and very dry conditions in most inland areas. Pastoral conditions in central and southern NSW are poor and deteriorating rapidly.

In the north–west, summer grasses have seeded and are drying off, posing a fire risk. Summer fodder crops in the more favoured areas have produced a fair amount of hay and allowed replenishment of fodder reserves. Stock health and condition have improved and more are moving in on agistment. Store sales have been well attended with producers restocking.

In contrast, continued rains on the coastal area saw flooding in several coastal valleys. However, this rain was restricted to the coast and even the upper Hunter valley is facing a desperate situation as winter approaches. Early grass growth has gone to seed without producing significant forage.

Disease Trends and Predictions

On the wet north coast, increased buffalo fly activity and sporadic cases of suspected ephemeral fever have occurred, along with the expected upsurge of clostridial deaths. Lush growth of kikuyu has caused kikuyu poisoning in dairy cows. Affected cattle are often recumbent and dehydrated, sham drinking may be seen. Necropsy findings include sticky subcutis, and a large rumen with wet content.

An awareness program has alerted north coast producers to the risks of importing diseases such as Johne's disease, vibriosis and leptospirosis with post–drought stock purchases. An Agnote titled "Avoid buying cattle diseases" has been widely distributed in the area. *(Contact: Peter Harper, Grafton, 066 420 467)*

An outcome of the earlier rainfall inland has also been an increased incidence of clostridial disease, bloat and plant poisonings. Haemonchosis is likely to continue as many sheep were not drenched during the drought. Pink eye continues to be a problem for cattle in many inland areas. Nitrate and oxalate poisonings have been common as has photosensitisation on panic grasses.

Two outbreaks of a rare renal problem occurred in the Molong district in young sheep. The nephrosis was caused by poisoning on *Amaranthus retroflexus* (redfoot or Prince of Wales feather) in a fallow paddock and on a sheep camp. *(Contact: Jeff Marshall, Orange, 063 913 873)*

Investigations of Suspected Exotic Diseases

A sudden mortality in geese and ducks was diagnosed as a toxicity, probably from mouldy corn.

Significant Disease Events

Tick Fever in Cattle

The first diagnosis of babesiosis in the Tick Quarantine Area for more than a decade was made in a steer in the Casino district. The animal died after a short clinical course characterised by depression, recumbency and diarrhoea. At post-mortem, haemoglobinuria was present and *B bovis* was found in tissues and on blood smears. No ticks were found on the cattle in the mob and no other cases occurred. All 20 cattle in the mob were ordered to slaughter under compensation. The source of the infection was not identified. *(Contact: Paul Gill or Peter McGregor, Wollongbar, 066 240 200).*

Theileriosis in adult cattle

Another tick-borne disease, theileriosis, was recently diagnosed as a cause of agalactia, anaemia and jaundice in adult Friesian cattle in Gloucester RLPB. This herd had been assembled from various sources including inland NSW. It was likely that the affected cows had not been previously exposed to tick vectors of *Theileria buffeli* or to the protozoan itself. *T buffeli* does not usually cause disease in locally raised cattle, but can cause haemolytic anaemia associated with significant parasitaemia in naive cattle. Theileriosis should be included in the differential diagnosis of icterus in adult cattle in *Haemaphysalis* infested areas, particularly if the cattle have come from a tick free area. The organisms are easily seen in blood films and infection can be confirmed serologically. *(Contact: Paul Gill, Wollongbar, 066 240 200)*

Anthrax Update

Suspected cutaneous anthrax in people in the Coonamble district reported in the last AHS Report have been confirmed as other bacterial dermatoses. The three people who had drenched sheep were found to have dermatophilosis. Investigation of the flock found many lambs affected by lumpy wool and isolates referred by the medical laboratory to NSW Agriculture were confirmed as *Dermatophilus congolensis*. The other suspect human case suffered a recurrence of the skin lesions previously treated as anthrax by his doctor. On this occasion a *Streptococcus* was isolated from swabs of the lesions taken before antibiotic therapy. *(Contact: Judy Ellem, Coonamble, 067 221 588)*

During February anthrax was confirmed in an endemic area in the Condobolin district, where 1% of 2800 merino ewes were found dead, and in the Holbrook district. Holbrook is not one of the recognised endemic areas in NSW, however about 25 of a mob of 175 cows and calves succumbed over a few weeks near Humula. The outbreak was controlled by removing the cattle from the paddock and vaccinating them. The last recorded in the area in 1944. The closest endemic locality is near Walla Walla, about fifty kilometres to the west.*(Contact: Steve Whittaker, Albury, 060 415 822)*

Supplies of anthrax vaccine are tight, pending the successful potency testing of two batches which is currently underway. In the meantime veterinarians are asked to prescribe vaccine conservatively for outbreak control and high risk situations.*(Contact: Ian Bell, Orange, 063 913 691)*

Mastitis outbreak

A significant increase in the incidence of clinical mastitis has been associated with the widespread use of a new post-milking teat spray. The vegetable oil product has no bactericidal components and may lead to udder infection with environmental bacteria if contaminated during preparation and storage or if it is used as a teat dip. In the Hunter valley, veterinarians also reported that a number of affected animals had developed gangrenous mastitis and died. Good quality soft water must be used in preparing the product. *(Contact: Dianne Ryan, Menangle, 046 293 378)*

Disease Surveys and Studies

National Arbovirus Monitoring Program

The only true seroconversions detected so far this arbovirus season in NSW have been to akabane virus in the Lismore sentinel group. Weak reactions were detected in February and the latest sampling has confirmed that akabane was very active in that area during February. *(Contact: Peter Kirkland, Menangle, 046 293 331)*

Nervous disease in feedlot cattle

Polioencephalomalacia was found to be the cause of significant losses in a northern feedlot with 3% of cattle developing the condition, on average within three weeks of going on feed. The animals' reserves of thiamine were probably depleted on entry and, although the diet was supplemented with 10mg/kg of thiamine, the low roughage barley-based diet probably resulted in excessive production of thiaminase. *(Contact: Peter Harper, Grafton, 066 420 467)*

Footrot Progress

The distribution of virulent ovine footrot continues to contract in NSW as evidenced by progress in the Protected Areas in the Orana region. No flocks are quarantined in the Walgett and Nyngan districts and only 4 flocks remain quarantined in the Coonamble, Coonabarabran and the part-Dubbo district PA's. *(Contact: Laurie Pryde, Dubbo, 068 811 275)*

Developments in Disease Recording and Reporting

Field Disease Recording

The *Fieldvet2* program has been installed on many PC's and networks at Rural Lands Protection Boards around the State, including the Scone RLPB for the first time. Delays have been experienced in acquiring computers for Denman–Singleton RLPB with the expected delivery date now in mid–April. In the Orana region, all but one of the 6 DV's systems are now operating *Fieldvet2* and *Epi Info 6*.

Some adjustments have had to be made by the network consultants at some Boards to allow *Epi Info 6* to run properly. Problems were also found on some PC's both here and overseas with *Epi Info 6*. Evan Sergeant at Tamworth advised CDC Atlanta of the problems and most of these have been addressed by an updated "ENTER" module (version 6.03) for the program. This was procured via the Internet by Evan and Steve Dunn at Guunedah has distributed it to Senior Field Veterinary Officers for further distribution.

Laboratory Disease Recording

Don Jones at EMAI Menangle has completed design work for disease reporting formats from *Labsys* and programming work will commence in March.

Getting Information on the Occurrence of Animal Diseases

This surveillance report can only convey a very limited amount of information about the occurrence and distribution of livestock diseases in NSW. If you would like more specific information about diseases occurring in your part of the State, contact your local RLPB District Veterinarian or departmental Senior Field Veterinary Officer or Regional Veterinary Laboratory. For statewide information contact David Kennedy.

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