New South Wales

ANIMAL HEALTH SURVEILLANCE

July - September

Number 96/3

LIVESTOCK AND PASTORAL CONDITIONS

Good general rains were received across most of the eastern half of the State during the quarter. Localised flooding was experienced in some areas, but was generally of only minor concern. The improved seasonal conditions have led to a corresponding improvement in pastures and crops across much of the State.

Only 29% of the State remained drought declared for October, compared to 56% for July. Continuing drought declaration was mainly limited to western areas, and some localised areas in the Hunter Valley and Central and Southern Tablelands areas.

With the good spring pasture and fodder growth in many areas, stock have generally improved in condition over the last few months.

DISEASE TRENDS AND PREDICTIONS

Flood Plain Staggers

Flood plain staggers (FPS) was first diagnosed in western NSW in 1990. Since then only occasional cases have occurred, but there is a substantial growth of the grass associated with Flood Plain Staggers (*Agrostis avenacea*) along the Darling and Bogan Rivers this year. Growth has been noted particularly in areas that were badly affected in the last outbreak, but also in other areas that were unaffected in 1990.

Surveys of the Bogan and Darling areas have shown evidence of both nematode galls, and *Clavibacter toxicus*, the bacterium associated with FPS. The risk of disease this year is difficult to assess, however there are indications that the risk may be lower than in 1990:

- there are far fewer plants with the complex of nematode/bacteria/plant pathology that leads to FPS;
- the plant is less abundant than in 1990, and far more alternative feed is available, which may reduce the consumption of *Agrostis;* and
- there has been some continuing rain, which may maintain alternative feed in good condition.

Some areas appear to have substantially more *Agrostis* this season than in 1990, and are

therefore likely to be at increased risk of disease. *(Contact: Greg Curran, Cobar, 068 362108)*

SIGNIFICANT DISEASE EVENTS

Anthrax

One outbreak of anthrax was confirmed during the quarter, in the Hillston Rural Lands Protection District. The disease was confirmed in both pigs and sheep, with 18 pigs and 4 lambs dying. The first deaths occurred in lambs, shortly after mulesing, with pig deaths commencing three days later. The pigs are thought to have been infected by scavenging on the carcases of lambs presumed to have died of anthrax. Affected pigs died rapidly, and had a haemorrhagic, oedematous swelling of the throat. *(Contact: Greg Curran, Cobar, 068 362108)*

Johne's Disease

During the quarter, *Mycobacterium paratuberculosis* was isolated from a pyogranulomatous lesion in a thoracic lymph node of a cow. This lesion was submitted for routine testing for TB, as part of the National Granuloma Submission Program. The property of origin of the infected cow has no previous known history of Johne's disease, and investigations are continuing to further clarify its status, and the source of infection. *(Contact: John Macfarlane, Armidale, 067 722366)*

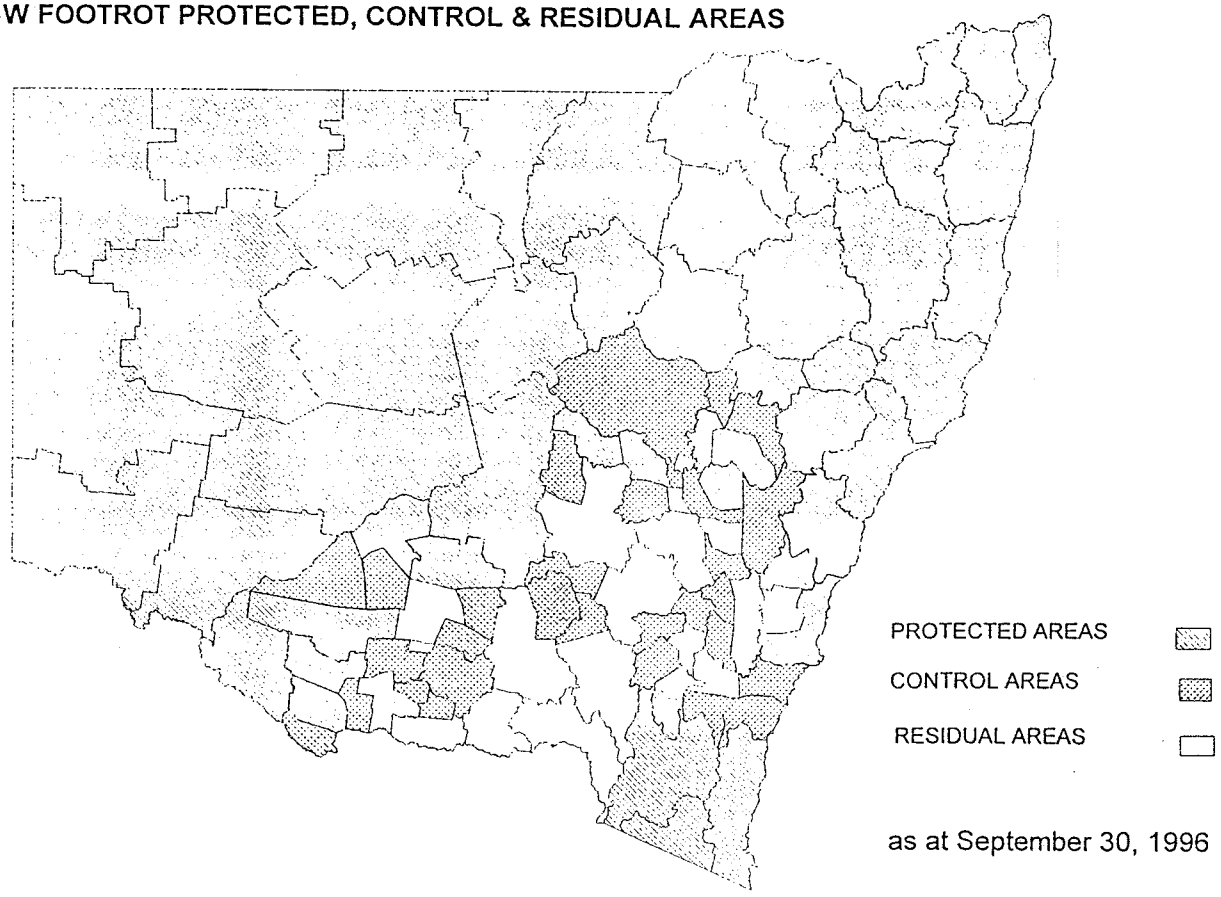
DISEASE CONTROL AND ADVISORY PROGRAMS

Footrot

The NSW Footrot Strategic Plan continues to progress well towards it target of eradication of footrot by the end of the year 2000. Currently, about 85% of the State is of Protected or Control Area status, and about 71% of the States flocks and 75% of sheep are in either Protected or Control areas (see map).

The excellent seasonal conditions experienced in much of the State have created ideal conditions for the spread of footrot and will provide a good test of the success of on-farm eradication programs conducted over last summer and autumn. *(Contact: Rob Walker, Wagga Wagga, 069 230463)*

NSW FOOTROT PROTECTED, CONTROL & RESIDUAL AREAS



Johne's Disease Market Assurance Program

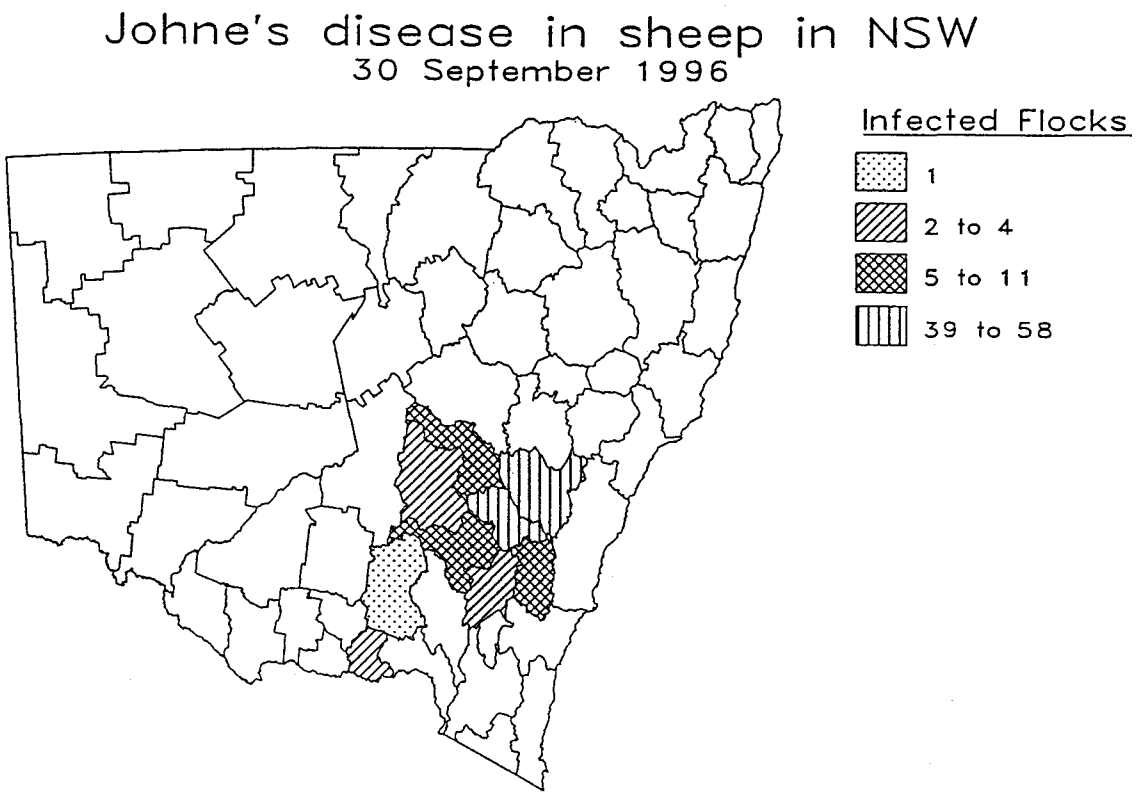
Since the launch of the program in May this year, more than 200 veterinarians have now been trained in the implementation of the Program in NSW. A total of 47 herds have now completed their first herd test, with 34 progressing to TN1 status. The remaining 13 herds are still awaiting the outcome of follow-up investigation of serological positive animals. To date, from 5,000 animals tested under the program, there have been only 20 positive reactors in 14 herds, a very encouraging result for producers concerned about false positive reactors disrupting their ability to trade. Of the 47 herds so far enrolled in the program, about two thirds are dairies.
(Contact: Tim Jessep, Goulburn, 048 230744)

Ovine Johne's Disease (OJD)

The NSW ovine Johne's disease Strategic Plan was finalised and adopted by the OJD Sheep Industry Steering Committee during the quarter. Work has now commenced on the development of a Market Assurance Program for OJD in New South Wales.

Targeted surveillance for Johne's disease, including tracing from infected properties, MAP testing and investigation of cases of illthrift, is planned to more clearly define the extent and distribution of the disease in NSW as part of the Strategic Plan. Work has already started on the investigation of properties linked by the movement of sheep to or from known infected properties.

Although this is a large task, it should provide a much more accurate picture of the distribution of this disease in NSW. Currently, of about 150 flocks detected with Johne's disease, the majority (about 80%) have been in the Central Tablelands area, with most other cases linked to this area by sheep movements (see map).
(Contact Steve Ottaway, Orange, 063 913854).



DISEASE SURVEYS AND STUDIES

Closantel resistance

Resistance to the anthelminthic closantel in *Haemonchus contortus* is an increasingly common occurrence in sheep flocks in the New England area. Closantel is a key drench in the Wormkill program and any loss of efficacy reduces the effectiveness of the program and impairs the ability of producers to effectively prevent haemonchosis in their flocks.

Alternative strategies have now been developed for use on properties where closantel resistance occurs, and NSW Agriculture has recently published an information booklet detailing these strategies. In addition, a survey of sheep producers in the New England and north west is being undertaken to further define the occurrence and severity of the problem.
(Contact: Peter Rolfe, Menangle, 046 293369)

Warialda Rural Lands Protection Board Survey

Bob McKinnon, District Veterinarian at Warialda has recently completed a survey of sheep and cattle management practices in the Warialda district. Producer response to the survey was excellent, and the results provide a good indication on management practices and animal disease conditions of concern in that area.

This survey will allow better targeting of disease control and advisory programs in the area, and will provide a baseline against which future progress can be measured.
(Contact: Bob McKinnon, Warialda, 067 291528)

Developments in Disease Recording and Reporting

An upgrade version of the Fieldvet disease recording system for district veterinarians was released during August/September. This upgrade was designed mainly to take advantage of new features of Epi Info 6.04, and to fix some other minor problems.

Fieldvet is an essential component of disease surveillance in NSW, and data collected from Fieldvet is used for reporting to the National Animal Health Information System.

The upgraded program was released at a series of workshops conducted across the State to train district veterinarians in the use of Fieldvet, and in the basic functions of Epi Info. Further upgrades are already planned, especially to incorporate additional databases to assist in the management of ovine Johne's disease investigations and tracing.
(Contact: Evan Sergeant, Orange, 063 913687)

STOP PRESS

Bat lyssavirus update

Lyssavirus infection was first diagnosed in Australia in a sick fruit bat in the north coast area of NSW in May 1996. Since that time the virus has been identified in samples from a further four cases in Queensland. At this stage no cases have been identified outside Queensland and northern NSW. This virus is related to the rabies virus, but is a genetically distinct virus and Australia's rabies-free status remains unaffected by this occurrence.

Although the risk of human infection with this virus is thought to be extremely low, one case has been diagnosed in a Queensland animal handler, who has since died. Research and surveillance priorities for this virus are being developed, and animal handlers are being advised to exercise caution when handling sick flying foxes and seek medical advice if bitten or scratched.
(Contact: Ian Bell, Orange, 063 913691)

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 Rural Lands Protection Board district veterinarian or departmental senior field veterinary officer or Regional Veterinary Laboratory.

For statewide information contact NSW Agriculture's Quality Assurance and Animal Health Program in Orange (063) 91 3237 or Fax (063) 61 9976.

Prepared by:

Evan Sergeant
State Coordinator
Animal Health Surveillance & Information
NSW Agriculture
Locked Bag 21
ORANGE NSW 2800
Phone: (063) 913687 or Fax: (063) 619976

NSW Agriculture