

Nurturing new lambs gets results

Good nutrition and correct vaccination protocols are vital, says **Richard Knight**



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Many of your customers will be well through or will have finished lambing by now. Thoughts will turn to nurturing and growing the new lambs as efficiently and quickly as possible. There are several causes of sudden death in lambs, including clostridial disease. Causes of sudden death should be investigated, usually as soon as the farmer flags it up, since his or her tolerance has usually run out by this stage. Most of these post-mortems are best done by vets specialising in small ruminants, or through the local APHA Veterinary Investigation Centre (VIC).

Good post-mortem data is a cornerstone of disease surveillance and is some of the most valuable information generated for a farmer. Over recent years we have come



across many farmers that don't vaccinate for clostridial disease. There are also many who have adopted a vaccination protocol which is far removed from the datasheet. These 'non-datasheet' protocols are mostly ineffective, such as a single shot.

Pulpy kidney disease and lamb dysentery are two of the main conditions we see. Pulpy kidney can occur even in large, well-grown lambs and in purchased, breeding tup lambs later in the year. Lamb dysentery is a bloody, commonly fatal scour occurring in lambs

under two weeks of age.

Vaccination against Pasteurella pneumonia is also something that all too often is contemplated only after a number of deaths have occurred. Single strain vaccines such as Ovipast are actually quite good in my experience, especially if the weather forecasts within the first few weeks of the lambs' lives are not very good. A sudden dip in temperature, along with an increase in wind and rain, will greatly increase the lambs' needs for energy for maintenance – that is, to keep warm.

This reduction in available energy for the body often reduces or stops growth and has the knock-on effect that the energy-hungry immune system can be depressed for a short but significant time. If the immune system is already primed with a suitable vaccine, then losses can be substantially mitigated.

However, over-riding all of

this, as always, is good nutrition. For the response to vaccination to go well, sheep must be healthy and well-nourished. If death rates are high, or lamb growth rates are low due to poor milk production in the ewe, then the whole flock response to vaccination may be dulled and losses may still occur. Keep talking to your customers and make sure that you get all the facts so that the best outcome can be achieved.

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