



Eastern Australia sheep worm outbreak

Worm control specialists are now receiving reports of extremely high, even dangerous, internal parasite levels in sheep from Tasmania and South Australia through to Western Queensland.

Arthur Le Feuvre, manager of the industry's web-based worm management resource-centre, WormBoss, says the outbreak is a direct consequence of the abnormal seasonal conditions across eastern Australia.

"Our veterinary and parasitology advisors are monitoring the situation closely; they all report that worm activity is high in every sheep production region - excepting WA, and that graziers are now experiencing significant production losses.

"The really serious and imminent threat is that posed by the Barbers Pole worm (*Haemonchus contortus*). This worm is typically found in summer-dominant rainfall regions but the unseasonal weather conditions mean it is causing problems further south than usual.

"In the far south of NSW and into Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia, the principal cause of production losses and deaths is Scour Worms (*Trichostrongylus* spp).

"If worm burdens are allowed to build up, rapid death can occur, regardless of the species of worm. And the only way to see worm build up is by doing regular worm egg counts."

Developed by the Sheep CRC and Australian Wool Innovation, WormBoss (see: www.wormboss.com.au) constantly monitors the national worm situation and provides information to producers to help maximise the timing and effectiveness of drenching and other management practices. Making More From Sheep also offers producers tips and tools for managing worms in flocks.

Arthur Le Feuvre says current worm burdens mean producers need to be very aware of what they're dealing with.

"Simply drenching sheep with a product grabbed off the shelf is just a shot in the dark – it is no guarantee that worms will be effectively controlled.

"Sadly, many graziers waste time, money and resources - with severe consequences to sheep health and farm profitability - in making bad drenching decisions."

He says to use the right, effective drench, graziers need the right background information – which means worm egg count and/or drench resistance tests as a first step.

"Farm management needs to be really on the ball and incorporate all available and proven tools in this situation to get through this situation with as few losses as possible.

"We strongly recommend that regular testing is first cab off the rank - if it's not already in place. The new *Haemonchus* Dipstick Test kit – developed by the Sheep CRC - is a key tool for a preventative approach to managing Barbers Pole worms."

"Producers who think they know it all might consider investing in some professional advice from a parasite management consultant."

Mr Le Feuvre adds that the threat will not diminish quickly when it stops raining or flooding. Worms are likely to continue to be active through Autumn and into Winter.

“Graziers can log-on to the free and up-to-date WormBoss site to receive essential and general information or special, localised advisory bulletins and points of contact for advisors. Anyone truly interested in sustainable worm management should subscribe to the free WormBoss monthly news and outlooks email, which will give them a brief snapshot of the current worm situation in their neck of the woods.”

For information, see: www.wormboss.com.au

For more tips and tools to help manage worms in flocks and the detection and management of drench resistance, see Module 11 in the Making More From Sheep Manual.