

NPVC LARGE ANIMAL NEWSLETTER WINTER 2021

Faecal Egg Count for Worm Burdens

Our staff have been working hard recently to revise our Faecal Egg Count (FEC) process and protocols. We are committed to continue to improve and ensure we are providing the most accurate counts for you, and the best advice.

Accuracy of our counts are also influenced by the quality of the samples given to us. Here are a few tips on how to make your samples the best they can possibly be!

- Ensure all samples are collected fresh from the sheep- holding the mob in the corner of the paddock for 10 minutes, then only collect freshly excreted samples. 12 x tablespoon sized samples are required at minimum
- Always use plastic containers or bags- anything with paper or cardboard ie egg cartons will absorb moisture from the faeces and falsely elevate counts
- Storage- it is critical that the sample is refrigerated as soon as collected and stored in the fridge, or else risk inaccurate counts. Ideally, drop the samples off Monday through to Thursday- samples received Friday samples risk having to wait until after the weekend.
- Representative sample- ensure that the samples are reflective of what the mob is looking like. For example, if you would say that 25% of the mob is scouring, then 25% of the samples should be from scouring sheep! While these samples certainly aren't fun to collect, they do make the count results as accurate and as representative of the whole mob as possible, therefore leading to better advice for you!
- Ensure the most amount of information possible is filled out on the submission form. This helps our vets flag any issues, and create the most accurate drench recommendation reports possible.



Photo credit: ABC

As our complimentary reports continue, it is important that **if you choose to follow the advice we set out, it is critical that you follow the report in its entirety.** This includes monitoring requirements, drench urgency and/or retest date. We always encourage retesting sooner rather than later, especially if you are noticing an issue, or sheep slipping in condition. If you prefer a phone call for your report, please note this in your submission- we are always happy to discuss the report or tailor it to your abilities.

Faecal Egg counts around lambing are critical. Ewes immunity and their ability to withstand the burden of worms decreases dramatically at lambing, so we need to make a tight plan to help manage this period.

- PRE-LAMBING: Be sure to bring your faecal egg counts into the clinic 8 weeks prior to lambing. This gives us time to do a count and a larval culture. Then we can have the data for appropriate drenching can occur on farm 6 weeks prior to lambing. We can also look to prepare sheep adequately if drench capsules are the preferred method of worm control
- LAMB MARKING: collect a sample from you ewes a week prior to lamb marking. This enables us to drench if required while the ewes are in the yards for marking, therefore saving on double handling. This is still critical, even if capsules are used, so we can give a cover drench if the capsule is not sufficient.
- If capsules are used, we need to be monitoring the worm burden as the capsule's efficacy weans (normally from about Day 90 post administration). Be sure to collect another egg count around this time and bring into the clinic. Capsules certainly need maintenance, and aren't a "set and forget" option for worm control.

Calving and Lambing

Many of our local producer are already flat out checking ewes and cows. Whilst we are always happy to help and be called out for calvings and caesareans, the greatest likelihood for success stories come from early intervention. We do have success stories from the "less fresh" calvings, the likelihood of success reduces with time.

Given the value of ewes, more producers are seeing the value in either calling a vet, or bringing ewes into the clinic that are suffering from a difficult lambing, vaginal or uterine prolapses. Ensure to treat them quickly, cleanly and give us a call if you do need assistance. If you are noticing lambing or calving issues frequently occurring, chat to one of our livestock vets to try to help manage these issues in your flock.



As with everything, preparedness is best- ensure you have chatted to your vet regarding mineral and feed requirements leading up to lambing and calving. Ensure you are routinely checking calving and females regularly (once or twice a day) so you can provide early intervention if required. Make sure you are stocked up with plenty of supplies to help your ewes or cows with issues as soon as needed think antiseptic, obstetrical lubricant and supplements such as 4-in-1, Ketol and electrolytes.

Not sure where to start? Call past the clinic to pick up a lambing box- full of such supplies for your convenience.

Colostrum management

With lambing and calving always comes the orphans, and colostrum is something we are frequently asked about in the clinic. The best colostrum is thick and golden in colour, coming from a mother who is up to date on vaccination and not suffering other illnesses. Best sources of colostrum are as follows:

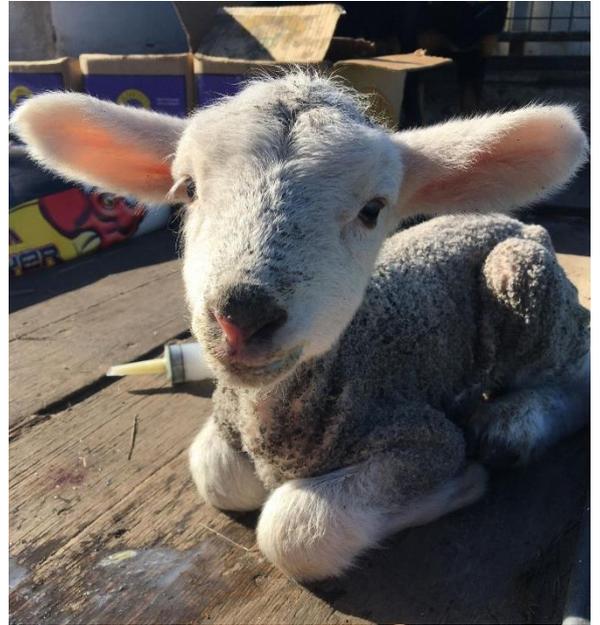
- 1: Genuine Species specific colostrum (Ewe colostrum for lambs, cow colostrum for calves)
- 2: Genuine colostrum from another ruminant (ie cow colostrum for a lamb)
- 3: Substitute Colostrum powder (ie Impact powder, sold from the clinic)

There are some recipes out there for “home-made colostrum” often involving adding egg, oil or sugar to normal lamb or calf milk. While these may pep the orphan up a bit due to increased energy and fat content, it is important to know that they do not contain any immunoglobulins (element required to fight off disease), which is one of the most important aspects of colostrum. They have the potential to mess with the digestibility of the normal milk powder and may cause scours as a result.

It should also be noted that eggs cannot be fed to ruminants, as they are considered a restricted animal material and are thus illegal to feed. These methods should not be reached for.

It is critical that a lamb or calf gets at least 10% of their body weight as high quality colostrum (ie 500 ml for a 5 kg lamb, 4 L for a 40 kg calf)- the more you can feed them, the better. This is ideally given in the first 12 hours of life to ensure proper absorption. After 24 hours the gut cannot absorb immunoglobulins, so it is critical that you get high QUALITY colostrum into the orphan, in the right QUANTITY, and do it QUICKLY!

You can collect colostrum in a clean, freezer safe container from ewes and cows to save for when you need it. If a female loses her offspring, or you pull a dead lamb or calf, use the opportunity to milk colostrum and freeze it in appropriate volumes. You may be able to collect excess colostrum off high producing females raising a baby, but just ensure she has gotten adequate quantity into her own young first. Colostrum may be kept frozen for the duration of your lambing or calving season, and should be thawed in a warm water bath slowly to be used. Some animals may need to have colostrum tubed to them to consume it- ensure you are well versed in the method of how to do this before taking it on.



Minerals in Lambing/Calving and Lactation

This year has shown to already be a shocker for mineral imbalances going into autumn lambing and calving. While every property has different trace mineral issues, two main mineral issues we see around late pregnancy and lactation across many farms is calcium and magnesium issues. We see this in both ewes and cows.

Hypocalcaemia (Milk Fever) refers to low calcium. This is not uncommon around birth and lactation because calcium is required in such high amounts at this time- it is needed for the uterus to contract properly to birth the lamb or calf, and to go on to produce milk. Peak milk production occurs around 6 weeks post birth, so calcium is required in high amounts for a long time. Clinical signs of hypocalcaemia may vary, but often include a proppy gait when walking or staggering, which progresses to being weak and sitting down. Tremors may occur, and can often be noticed on the ears and lips, and some producers may even describe an “S shaped neck”.



S shaped neck associated with hypocalcaemia.

Photo credit: Veterian Key

Hypomagnesaemia (Grass Tetany) refers to low magnesium. These cows and ewes may appear initially very excited- they will have ears pricked up and heads held high, and may attempt to chase other animals and people when not provoked. This may progress to sitting down, then convulsions and death. It may also cause sudden death with no clinical signs. Short, fast growing pasture is particularly high risk for hypomagnesaemia, and recent fertiliser history can be critical for a diagnosis. Low blood magnesium also affects calcium levels in the body and can lead to hypocalcaemia too.

Clinical cases of both diseases are emergencies, and should be treated as such- phone a vet for intervention. Treatment and prevention on a herd level often include supplementation of calcium and magnesium.

The amount of supplements that are on the market for trace minerals is absolutely mind boggling. Be sure to chat to one of our livestock vets as to what supplements may be best for your operations- not all products are equal in quality and efficacy, and it is important for us to work out what may be able to be included into your operation. It is also critical we get timing of these supplements correct, or risk an even larger issue. For unbiased advice that is tailored to your operation, phone one of our veterinarians at Naracoorte or Penola.

Health Investigations

One of our biggest jobs at this time of year is disease and sudden death investigations in both sheep and cattle. If you are noticing the same or similar symptoms or ailments in your mob, this can be a very good indication to phone one of our livestock vets for advice or to make a plan. This includes problems that occur from year to year- we frequently have cases where we hear 'we often lose a few like this at this time of year' or "the mob on this particular paddock always go backwards". Data like this really helps our investigation, and we enjoy being able to come to a resolution for our producers so they don't have to continually put up with such losses.

We are also very lucky to have many government subsidies available to help with the costs of herd level investigations, which we get from both the South Australian and the Victorian governments.

Our livestock vets and our nurses work tirelessly to try and get these subsidies for our clients, to help make the investigations easier. These investigations help our vets make the most accurate, well informed plan ongoing for your property, and beats clutching at straws with what it may be causing the issues. We are always happy to have a chat, or come out and visit, so please never hesitate to phone us at either clinic.



Lamb marking preparation

As many of our regular newsletter readers would know, our pain relief options are increasing for our lambs at lamb marking. Our clinic stocks

- Metacam 20, the injectable pain relief
- Buccalgesic, the oral pain relief
- Numocaine for use with Numnuts, which can be used on testicles and tails.

Numnuts may be used in conjunction with Buccalgesic and Metacam 20. We have Numnuts applicators that can be hired for a small fee. Prices vary between quantities of different stock, so for a price estimate for your numbers, please phone the clinic. Call the clinic to place an order for supplies- ensure this is at least 1-2 weeks prior to when you require it.

Remember as well this is a good time to be checking your ewes as well- how are their condition? Are energy requirements being met? How many ewes have raised a lamb? What are out percentage ewes who have brought a lamb through from scanning to marking?

Checking wet/dry ewes at marking can be a good way to assess lamb survivability and mothering ability of your ewes, with an excessive number of dry ewes at marking possibly indicating an issue. Our livestock vets are always happy to sit down with you and analyse any red flags, to help make a plan to get the most lambs through to marking next year in a given mob. Worms are a consideration in these ewes too- as mentioned above, don't forget to get your pre-lambing marking faecal egg count into the clinic in the week prior to lamb marking to make sure you have the data ready so you can act on it while the ewes are in the yards!