NARACOORTE & PENOLA Veterinary centres

Worm detection in cattle

Worms behave differently in cattle to sheep so sheep egg count techniques are of very limited value.

1) Up to 6 months of age, egg counts are a reasonable technique.
2) After 6 months of age, the egg count per gram of faeces in cattle is far lower than in sheep, such that the sheep technique will not even detect any but the most dramatic of burdens. There is a specialist cattle egg count technique available, but it is complicated and expensive.
3) The degree of infection between cattle in the same herd is typically very large so bulked egg counts even using the specialised technique are worthless. 10 – 12 separate samples are really necessary to get a useful count.
4) Encysted larvae (dormant larvae within the stomach lining) play a huge part of cattle worm problems, and are not detected by egg counting.

The traditional method for detection of worm burden in cattle is a blood test for a compound called pepsinogen. Pepsinogen is released from damaged stomach tissue, typically as a result of the presence of worms. Note that it will take some time to return to normal levels after the worms are treated – weeks following a severe infection.