

# Animal Health Update

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1. Introduction
2. Nutritional value of stubbles
3. Lupinosis
4. Summer Plant Toxicity
5. Nitrate Poisoning
6. Worms

## Introduction

The wet spring of 2010 has continued into summer with regular and substantial rainfall events. On the back of these outstanding seasonal conditions and solid markets for all classes of stock, livestock enterprises are performing extremely well.

However these seasonal conditions have also given rise to some animal management issues that we have not had to consider for a number of seasons. This newsletter focuses on some of these issues and how best to deal with them as we move through the later summer months.

## Nutritional value of Stubbles

At present there is an abundance of green feed on offer with pasture production running close to spring levels. At the same time, as harvest winds up, many producers are looking to commence spraying out stubbles and cropping paddocks and using stock to strategically graze many paddocks.

While the practise of grazing stubbles with livestock has become an important and useful option in most years it is important to recognise the limitations that stubbles do have for livestock production. The nutritional value

of stubbles is derived from grain that is left in the paddock, residual dead leaves plus any green plant material present. This year the green plant material is dominated by weeds. Once this feed has been eaten the nutritional value of stubble is quite poor and stock will lose condition quite rapidly. Once this point is reached supplementary feeding will be necessary to maintain liveweight.

As a rough guide the following levels of grain per square meter are required to benefit stock.

Pulses	- 60 to 80
Cereals	- 250 to 300

If stubbles become the major source of nutrition for stock, trace minerals and nitrogen levels are too low in stubbles to sustain enough microbial activity in the rumen. This can limit the amount of stubble consumed and the animal's ability to digest it. The product Nutri-Lifter, as well as, Dry Season blocks have been recommended in cases to remedy this problem. It is always essential to provide a good supply of water. As an example and depending on the weather, the stubble type and the salt content of the water, weaner sheep will drink up to 7ltrs per day and adults more than this.

## Lupinosis

Lupinosis in livestock is another disease which has become more prevalent this season when grazing lupin stubbles. The phomopsis fungus which grows on the lupin stubble produces a toxin which can kill sheep and sometimes cattle. The fungus grows rapidly after summer

rain events and remains toxic until the fungus dries out and dies off again.

Often the first sign of the disease is finding dead and dying animals but before death, it is common for the effected animals to go off feed, become lethargic and staggery if handled.

The grazing value of lupin stubbles is in the grain on the ground. If the number of grains drop below 40 per square metre or there is less than 50% ground cover then the chance of Lupinosis is enhanced as once the stock have eaten the bulk of the grain the stems are more likely to be eaten. If the stock are consuming the stems and warm moist conditions are prevalent then the recommendation would be to remove the stock.

Once stubbles are toxic they can stay that way until very hot dry conditions prevail again. To help reduce the risk, giving the stock access to another paddock to graze at the same time will help dilute any toxins that may be present.

### **Summer Plant Toxicity**

In general most summer growing weeds do not cause any problems, however there are several that have the potential to be toxic. These include Hairy Panic, Heliotrope and Loosestrife.

This summer, paddocks dominated by *hairy panic* have caused some serious problems with several instances of sheep deaths being reported. Symptoms to look for are a black or red nose, runny and swollen eyes and finally photo sensitisation of the animal.

Young sheep appear to be more susceptible but deaths in old sheep have also been reported. Removing the stock from the paddock and providing good shade, water and feed is the best way to prevent further losses.

*Heliotrope* is another plant which is quite prevalent in stubbles again this year. Like hairy panic, Heliotrope can cause liver damage and when consumed over a period of time can affect appetite, weight gain / body weight,

wool production and fertility, and can result in death.

Sheep can die from *Heliotrope* consumption over several years due to a number of secondary effects caused by the liver damage such as copper poisoning, pregnancy toxaemia and ammonia poisoning. If attended to promptly, critically effected sheep have been saved with the administration of Methion as a drench although an assessment of possible permanent liver damage would need to be considered.

Whilst cattle will generally not eat heliotrope if other feed is available, it can be very toxic, with deaths in cattle occurring in as little as 10 days, or as long as some months after commencing to eat heliotrope.

Loosestrife, which is a multi stemmed small leaved plant with square stems and small purple to mauve flowers, is also toxic if consumed in significant quantities. This weed proliferates in wet areas and can become an issue when spray grazing paddocks with large areas dominated by this weed.

With all these weeds, restricting livestock access to paddocks with a potential problem is the easiest answer. In those cases where grazing cannot be used to tidy up sprayed paddocks, the spray recommendation may need to be altered, your Delta Agronomist can provide practical spraying options where required.

### **Nitrate Poisoning**

Nitrate poisoning is a condition which appears in some livestock on a particular feed source almost every year. Feed sources such as recently fertilised crops, fertile sheep camps with recently sprayed thistles and weeds such as, capeweed can all provide high levels of nitrate at times throughout the year. One of our biggest risks at the moment however is the grazing of canola stubbles. Typically the paddocks will have high levels of residual fertiliser with quick growing self sown plants along with a variety of other weeds. Along with certain climatic conditions these paddocks can become high risk very quickly

as we progress through to the summer months. For example very hot summer days which wilt the plants will concentrate the nitrates making the feed source more dangerous to the animal.

If you are choosing to graze these paddocks before or immediately after spraying it would be best to avoid introducing hungry stock or animals of poor health and to make dry cereal hay available if possible. Monitoring stock and introducing them slowly to a high risk paddock are good management practises.

### **Worms**

The unusually wet spring and summer conditions have also induced a proliferation of worms. The egg counts in some areas have increased to surprisingly high levels. Faecal egg counts ranging from 700 epg, right up to 2,500 epg have been reported by LHPA vets from Young, Wagga, Yass, and Gundagai.

The more South Western areas of Temora, Coolamon and Lockhart are also experiencing conditions conducive to worm

reproduction with the odd egg count as high as 1,200 epg.

Black Scour worm (*Trichostrongylus* sp), Small Brown Stomach worm (*Ostertagia*), and Barbers Pole worm were the predominant species detected. If the wet summer conditions do persist, Barbers Pole worms can become a huge problem very quickly.

The adult female Barbers Pole worm can lay up to 10,000 eggs per day and thrive when conditions are warm and moist. They are a large worm and their blood feeding habits can have a big impact in sheep and cattle. The larvae can migrate up the water layer formed on pasture grasses when it rains or on dewy mornings, which increases the chance of being eaten.

Your Delta Ag branch can assist you with conducting faecal egg counts and drench resistance tests and the subsequent development of a worm management plan.

**Disclaimer: This newsletter is for the benefit of clients. It is not intended to be a complete analysis of all issues raised in the newsletter. As individual circumstances can vary, further professional advice should always be sought before any course of action is undertaken.**