

# Sheep disease intelligence survey

— Project No. AH 393

*A low-cost project, instigated to provide monthly data on economic conditions affecting sheep in Mid and South Canterbury, was run for 3 years. AHD field staff involved collected data from farmers, veterinarians, stock agents, freezing companies, and the Lincoln Animal Health Laboratory. The project has been completed, and this report covers the first 2 years.*

The objectives of the project were to:

- Provide monthly data on major economic conditions affecting sheep in the counties of Strathallan, Waimate, MacKenzie and Ashburton and thereby:
  - Provide useful data on sheep problems for more accurate reporting.
  - Provide information on which research work could be focused.
  - Achieve a higher AHD profile in disease surveillance in sheep.
- The results have been used to:
- Focus extension and project work on problems of sheep health causing most concern amongst farmers.
  - Provide information for systems such as situation reports.
  - Provide information for sheep health commentary by Animal Health Division staff.

## Method

This project was run for a 3-year-period.

Data were collected from sentinel farms, stock agencies, veterinary practices, freezing works, and the Lincoln Animal Health Laboratory:

- There were six sentinel farms in Strathallan, MacKenzie, and Waimate counties and 12 in Ashburton county. Each was selected on a non-random basis, with emphasis on the dependability and commonsense of the owners.

Each farm was representative of a particular geographic area and had in excess of 1000 breeding ewes.

- There were 11 stock agents from the Waimate, Strathallan, and MacKenzie counties.
- All 11 veterinary practices in the area were involved, representing 19 veterinarians.
- Data were collected from Pareora and Fairton freezing works.

## Data collection

Farmers, agents, and vets were telephoned at the end of each month. The three most important diseases or production-limiting conditions for the month were ranked in order of importance.

Computerised disease prevalence data were received from the freezing companies at the end of the month.

The Lincoln AHD Laboratory figures on case involvement in disease categories for the counties of Waimate, Strathallan, MacKenzie, and Ashburton were received every 3 months.

Data were collated on a monthly basis. The farmer/agent and veterinarian sections are kept separate. The disease/condition ranked highest was given three points, the second two points, and third one point.

The points for each condition were then added. In addition, each disease or condition cited by a farmer was given one point. This was to give a farm-incidence figure.

## Main information

The data collected from farmers, agents, and veterinarians formed the main information. The freezing companies information was collated to show a percentage incidence of disease in both lamb and mutton over number killed. The laboratory information was used by highlighting any interesting trends or conditions.

Results showed that foot problems, abortion, scabby mouth, ryegrass staggers, metabolic problems, and parasitism were causing most concern to farmers.

## Comment

It is conceded that the data collected were almost wholly 'soft data'.

However, the project has pointed the way for extension and project work e.g., scabby-mouth-awareness campaign, ryegrass staggers awareness, and a footrot project.

The results were sent to each contributor, were printed in the Timaru Herald's farming review supplement, and were also used to give radio talks on current sheep health problems.

Dialogue with local veterinary practitioners on a monthly basis was good for MAF/vet relations.

After the project had been going 12 months, the farmers were asked if they wished to pull out. All refused.

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