NEW ENGLAND OJD ADVISORY COMMITTEE.
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A NEW ENGLAND PERSPECTIVE ON THE CONTROL OF O.J.D.
IN AUSTRALIA.

1. Historical Perspective.
   Following the first identified case of O.J.D. by the District
   Veterinarian Dr. Chris Dent (Blayney N.S.W.) at Trunkey Creek on the
   Central Tablelands of N.S.W., (reported in the Australian Veterinary Journal
   1984) active surveillance for O.J.D. began throughout the State. At the time
   there were Regional Veterinary Laboratories in Armidale, Orange, Wagga
   and Wollongbar. Many sheep with wasting disease were autopsied at
   Armidale, Orange and Wagga and while sheep were found infected with
   O.J.D. at Orange and Wagga, none were found at the Armidale laboratory.
   Surveillance continued at the Armidale laboratory until its closure in 1998.
   No sheep with O.J.D. were seen there during this period.

   Following this, over 400 sheep sent to a pet food abattoir at Guyra
   were autopsied by the late Dr. John Macfarlane, the Rural Lands Protection
   Board’s District Veterinarian. Samples of intestine and adjacent lymph
   nodes were sent to the Regional Veterinary Laboratory at Orange for
   examination. These samples were all negative for O.J.D.

   During 2003-2005 Rural Lands Protection Board Rangers doing
   surveillance for virulent footrot collected faecal samples from old ewes in
   hundreds of flocks in New England whilst the sheep were in the sheep
   handler. Again, all samples sent to the Regional Veterinary Laboratory at
   Menangle were all negative for O.J.D.

   Abattoir surveillance of sheep slaughtered at Dubbo and Wallangarra
   has been intensive. A number of “positive” tracebacks to New England have
   all been investigated. In each case, the properties were found to be NOT
   infected. (Two or three infected flocks have undergone eradication with the
   help of the local L.H.P.A.) Recent data from the Department of Primary
   Industries N.S.W. reveals that 724 flocks in New England have had abattoir
   surveillance on slaughtered sheep over the last 5 years. Some of these flocks
   have been tested twelve (12) times. All lines from these properties have been
   NEGATIVE.

   New England has far more sheep flocks in the M.A.P. than anywhere
   in Australia. These flocks, mainly stud flocks do repeat testing, and all have
   MN3 status.
2.

Because of this excellent history, New England can claim there are no known O.J.D. infected flocks here.

As O.J.D. continued to spread in the south of the State, and with New England’s apparent freedom from the disease agitation by the producers took place to have our special status recognized by the government. In 2004 Minister Ian McDonald gave our area Exclusion Area status (along with some other areas). In essences this proclaimed New England as a Protected Area. New England needed to show that its producers supported an Exclusion Area and a survey in 2003 and again in 2011 made clear that the Exclusion Area had widespread support by industry. In fact, in the survey in 2011 of 1/3rd of 1500 sheep farmers in New England, 67% replied to the survey and 96% were in favour of maintaining the Exclusion Area.

Under the Exclusion Area guidelines, there is a protocol in place to manage any incursions of infection. The Directors of the New England L.H.P.A. and the local District Veterinarians make up the New England O.J.D. Management Committee and have money set aside in the L.H.P.A. budget to undertake measures such as “ring” vaccination should an infected property be found. The New England Advisory Committee is made up of local sheep farmers and private vets involved in sheep work. This Committee’s job is to educate the farming community on the epidemiology of O.J.D. so they can move from “awareness to understanding” and thence be better able to practice good risk-management when purchasing sheep for their individual properties.

In my opinion, this program of education has been an outstanding success and is the main reason why New England is still apparently free of O.J.D. In November 2012, New England sent its application to Australian Health Authority to have a Regional Biosecurity Plan (R.B.P.) approved. Unfortunately, this is on hold whilst a new National Program is being organized by industry.


(1) It is critical that the sheep industry recognizes O.J.D. is an epidemic, as the disease continues to slowly spread from the endemic areas to more and more areas where previously it did not exist or was low prevalence. We agree with 3 out of the 4 “proposed amendments” as listed on page 1 of the Document, but we are very disappointed there is to be no recognition of Control or Protected Areas as a result of the lack of government support. New England will still maintain its Regional Biosecurity Plan and I feel sure
producers will continue to practice good biosecurity and risk management (“buyer beware”) as they purchase sheep introductions.  

(2) The 2 “Objectives” listed on page 3 are excellent and we fully support both, but we would hope those farmers who live in areas where the disease is endemic or known to exist would also realize they have a duty-of-care to not want to see infection spread to areas of low prevalence. It is of crucial importance that those trading vaccinated sheep complete the Sheep Health Statement honestly and accurately, so prospective purchasers can accurately assess any disease risk.  

(3) Re the Sheep Health Statement:- It should remain mandatory that the Sheep Health Statement be completed for every trading transaction and that it remains a legal document underpinned by State legislation, making it an offence to make a false statement. It has to be simple, easily understood and only take a short time to complete.  

(4) Re Abattoir Surveillance: - Without this, there is no way of defining prevalence areas or how the disease is spreading. Areas like New England, Queensland and South Australia need abattoir surveillance to discover as early as possible any incursion of O.J.D. into their zero-low prevalence areas. Abattoir Surveillance is an excellent tool as well for those wishing to trade into low prevalence areas where trade restrictions may apply e.g. Queensland.  

(5) Re Deregulation:- We would remind industry that the control of O.J.D. in N.S.W. has been essentially deregulated since 2004, when properties with O.J.D. were no longer quarantined. The only regulation has only been honestly complete the Sheep Health Statement. It is NOT a regulation if farmers or areas practice good biosecurity.  

In conclusion, New England’s biggest concern, along with the concerns of all the zero-low prevalence areas of Australia is the trading of vaccinated sheep from O.J.D. infected properties. The evidence is that a percentage of vaccinated lambs on infected properties will go on to shed the O.J.D. bacteria in very significant numbers (I billion per gram of faeces). These sheep may well be in good condition but pose a major risk for a property attempting to practice good biosecurity.  

D.C. Moen  
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