

Footrot - Making a comeback

A number of areas around Australia have been free from footrot for over 20 years, however recent outbreaks have been an unfriendly reminder for producers to not get too comfortable.

Footrot is recognised among the most significant animal health issues for Australian sheep producers in high winter rainfall areas.

It is a highly contagious disease, and research by the Mackinnon Project has revealed the cost of footrot can be as much as \$7.64 per head, resulting in a national cost of \$12.4 million each year.

Footrot is an infectious disease that can range from a benign strain, often referred to as scold, to an aggressive virulent strain. The infection spreads in warm wet conditions typically associated with spring and the bacterium is able to survive seven days off the sheep. Warmer dryer months see no spread, with the bacteria dying rapidly.



A healthy foot (left) compared to a foot with score 3 footrot (right). Source: Coopers Animal Health.

Make a plan!

Successful eradication of footrot will happen if you develop a plan with your local sheep vet and an experienced accredited footrot contractor.

It is important to diagnose the strain of footrot so that appropriate steps can be put in place. Once identified, it can be controlled in a variety of ways including foot-bathing, quarantine and, if necessary, antibiotics.

Managing the spread of disease over winter and spring will limit the damage and an eradication program revolves around the non-spread period, summer, and may include culling affected sheep.

Keep checking

Don't assume that your eradication process has you free of footrot indefinitely.

Consistent inspections of your mob's feet along with appropriate biosecurity procedures are essential in the fight against footrot.

Strategies to prevent footrot entering your property include:

- purchase sheep from clean flocks and examine feet for lesions, lameness and signs of treatment before purchase
- request a Sheep Health Statement stating with the property's footrot status
- when transporting stock ensure the truck is clean
- footbath sheep on arrival and quarantine them from other sheep for an adequate period
- reduce the chance of strays bringing in infection by ensuring boundary fences are sheep proof
- don't move sheep along roads that have been used by other sheep in the previous seven days.

For more information, contact Livestock Health & Biosecurity Victoria's Catherine James or Kimberley Henman on 5444 9777 or email lhbv@vff.org.au.

Visit www.lhbv.org.au for a range of animal health and biosecurity resources and follow along on Twitter or Facebook @vff_LHBV.