



RED MEAT UPDATES

TASMANIA

Grazing lambs in lucerne

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Lyndall

Grazing lambs in lucerne



Introduction

- RMU working group discussions
- Lamb mortality an issue raised a number of times
- Dr Bruce Jackson suggested a survey to collect data
- A survey was developed and sent to as many producers grazing lambs on lucerne as possible

Survey questionnaire

- **Sheep mortalities on Lucerne survey**
- Farm code: Date: Interviewer:
- Nearest town:
- My name is from and I am conducting a survey of sheep producers who have grazed their sheep/lambs on lucerne to try to identify strategies that will minimize sheep deaths.
- This survey will take 15 minutes, do you have time now or is there a time and number I can ring again? time:..... number:
- How many ha of Lucerne do you grow?
- Is it all irrigated? if not how much is dry land?
- Have you experienced any sheep/lamb deaths on lucerne over the last 12 months?
- **Producers who have experienced sheep/lamb deaths on lucerne (capture details for each incident):**
 - Age of sheep/lambs,
 - Time of year
 - If you saw the sheep alive, what signs were they showing?
- d. Were they bloated (dead or alive)?
- e. How fast did they blow up after death?
- f. Please describe the pulpy kidney vaccination program for those sheep/lambs (including their mothers if lambs died)
- g. How long had the sheep/lambs been continuously grazing lucerne?Hrs orDays
- h. How long had they been in that paddock? Hrs or Days
- i. When was the paddock last irrigated before they died? hours ordays
- j. What % of lucerne was flowering when deaths occurred?
- k. Was grain being fed? If so, grams/head/day?what type of grain?:
- l. Was hay/silage/paddock roughage available? if so describe roughage and how much was fed:
- m. What pattern of access to Lucerne was practiced (eg 5 days on, two off)
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Survey questionnaire (cont.)

- **Producers who have NOT lost sheep lambs on lucerne in the last 12 months:**
 - Have you placed sheep or lambs on lucerne that is less than 50% flowering in the last 12 months? Sheep yes/no, Lambs yes/no
 - What pulpy kidney vaccination program do you use on sheep/lambs grazing lucerne?
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 - Do you feed grain to sheep/lambs on lucerne? If so, grams/head/day? what type of grain?:Do you use Restrict?
 - Do you irrigate lucerne while sheep/lambs are grazing that paddock?
 - What is the shortest period before sheep/lambs go onto lucerne that you ever irrigate that paddock?
- What paddock/hay/silage roughage do you provide?
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Survey data

- 10 producers from the Midlands and Derwent valley were surveyed by phone
- Giving data on 26,520 crossbred and Merino lambs
- Many thanks to Dr Bruce Jackson and his assistant for their efforts in collecting this data

Survey data (cont.)

- 439 deaths were recorded
- 1.6% losses ranging from 0.2% – 3.2%
- Losses valued at about \$44,000
- No difference between Merinos and crossbreds
- Some producers who had autopsies done reported a diagnosis of red gut

Survey data (cont.)

Fatalities on lucerne can generally be attributed to one of three conditions:

- red gut
- frothy bloat
- pulpy kidney

...and it may be possible for one or all of these conditions to be going on at the same time.

Survey data — actions that decreased risk

- Administering a third '5 in 1' vaccination
- Grazing lucerne when the paddock is at least 50% flowering
- Unlimited access to high-fibre feed source, such as hay and dry pasture
- Access to vitamins and mineral supplements
- Not grazing continuously
- Not 'hungry' when placed on lucerne

Decreasing risk — lucerne at least 50% flower



Decreasing risk — lucerne at least 50% flower

- Interestingly — irrigating lucerne while lambs were in the paddock did not increase or decrease the risk of sudden death across the producers surveyed.

Lyndall experiences

- We found that irrigating (or receiving more than 8 – 10mm rainfall) increased the risk of sudden death.
- Try to have the lucerne above 50% flowering. If this isn't possible, try and dry out lucerne as much as possible.
- Provide unlimited access to hay.
- We don't feed grain, but if we did we would only use oats or oathull pellets.

Conclusion

- Bruce Jackson was of the opinion that further investigation into this issue would be of great benefit.
- Lucerne is used extensively on the mainland for fattening lambs but most paddocks have grasses sown with them to help with this issue.

Top three take home messages

- Administering a third '5 in 1' vaccination
- Grazing lucerne when the paddock is at least 50% flowering
- Unlimited access to high-fibre feed source, such as hay and dry pasture

Thank you

