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Is it worth while to treat this common summer ailment?

Pinkeye in Sheep
Some Timely Comments
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The eye of a sheep badly affected with pinkeye. The cornea is opaque and ulcerated and the animal is blind.

DURING the summer months, it is almost inevitable that numbers of sheep in Western Australia will suffer from contagious ophthalmia—or pinkeye, to give the disease its more popular name. As it can be quite a distressing disease which can cause severe setbacks, most flock owners, knowing that medicaments are available for the treatment of pinkeye, will feel that they should do something for the affected animals.

Before dropping everything and dashing off to invest in one of the several medicaments, however, it might be advisable to study the following questions.

What happens if the disease is allowed to run its normal course without interference?

What medicaments are available for treatment and how effective are they?

What will be the cost of treatment in time and money and can treatment be carried out efficiently?

The first question is very pertinent as it has been found that in the majority of cases only a mild form of the disease is seen. In these cases inflammation of the eye and a watery discharge is followed by some cloudiness of the cornea (clear front portion of the eye). Usually within 10 to 14 days of the onset of symptoms the eyes are normal again. In a small percentage of cases the disease is more severe and it may persist for as long as six weeks, with the affected sheep blind for a month or more. The eye of the sheep however has remarkable powers of recovery and even when the cornea has become cloudy and deeply ulcerated, healing will occur leaving little or no blemish.

The second question is partly answered already because in all diseases in which the animal has normal powers of recovery, there are naturally innumerable successful “treatment” agents. For pinkeye these vary from the more expensive chloreomycetin 10 per cent. eye ointment to zinc sulphate 10 per cent. eye drops in
which the cost of the medicament is negligible. Some of the treatments aim primarily at killing the germs causing the disease while others assist healing after the germ has been overcome naturally by the sheep. No matter which medicament is used for treatment, for full effect it must be used three to four times a day, which is nearly impossible with flock treatment. Even then its value is doubtful as eyes left untreated often recover just as quickly as those treated.

The cost of treatment is not high for the medicaments used but the loss of time and the cost of employed labour, if used, is quite expensive. Treatment, to be effective, is a full-time job for at least a week. It can be gathered therefore that mass treatment of flocks is unnecessary, impracticable and uneconomic.

The most practical approach to the disease when it strikes is to give the sheep a good chance to recover naturally, with the minimum of setback, by placing them in a paddock with plenty of food, shade and water. If labour is available, bad cases should be drafted off, segregated and treated at least three times a day for about a week with one of the medicaments listed at the end of this article. This will help lessen the period of blindness and the setback to the small percentage of badly-affected sheep.

Thus, in most cases flock treatment for pinkeye is not advised but the treatment of badly-affected sheep and sheep of special value, such as stud rams, is recommended. In cases where treatment is used it is essential to treat each eye several times each day.

The commonest drugs available for treatment are:

1. Chloromycetin and aureomycin eye ointments.
2. Penicillin cream or penicillin eye drops (1,000 units/cc).
3. Sulphacetamide one part and boric two parts mixed together and blown into the eye by a powder blower.
4. Zinc sulphate 10 per cent. solution (2 oz. of zinc sulphate in one pint of water).
5. Argyrol 30 per cent. solution.

In conclusion, do not treat affected eyes with kerosene or dieseline as both are extremely irritant and cause the sheep more suffering than the disease.

USE OF CROSSBRED BOARS DEPLORED

At a recent meeting of the West Australian Pig Advisory Committee, the introduction of the Landrace pig was widely discussed and farmers were warned against the indiscriminate use of cross-bred Landrace boars.

The Committee deplored the high prices being paid for these cross-bred boars, as the progress made in convincing farmers that pure-bred sires are desirable could be nullified if these cross-bred animals were widely used. In any type of livestock breeding, pure-bred sires were desirable as it was most unlikely that cross-breds would breed true to type.

The Committee recommended that the Department of Agriculture should continue its work on making appreciations of the breeds of pigs now in use and particularly of new breeds such as the Landrace.

Concern was expressed regarding the prevalence of virus pneumonia in the State's pig herds, as this disease, besides causing some deaths, commonly resulted in reductions in growth rates and unsatisfactory food conversion figures. The Committee recommended that more publicity be given to this disease and to methods of producing pneumonia-free breeding stock.

Appreciation was expressed of the valuable work of the Veterinary Branch of the Department of Agriculture in its programme of lice eradication and notification was given that the W.A. branch of the Australian Pig Society was prepared to give financial support to the making of a film dealing with some aspects of pig raising.