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STOCK DISEASES CONTROL BY CORRESPONDENCE

By J. SHILKIN, B.V.Sc., Senior Veterinary Surgeon

There is a time honoured legend that the following letter was received by a Government Veterinary Surgeon, "Dear Sir, my horse is sick what shall I do? I trust you will be able to reply by return mail as I am very worried. Yours faithfully, John Smith." While this story may or may not be entirely true it is at least very close to the truth as many veterinarians can testify.

Letters are continually being received by the Department of Agriculture seeking advice regarding the diagnosis and treatment of sickness or disease in animals. While diagnosis of ill-health is often difficult enough when the animal concerned is in a position to be examined thoroughly by a veterinarian, the difficulties are greatly increased when diagnosis is attempted per medium of a letter and still more, when virtually no information other than that the animals are sick is given in such letters.

The assistance that officers of the Veterinary Branch can give in regard to preventive measures or remedial treatment is dependent upon a diagnosis that is as accurate as possible. If the information supplied is scanty or almost negligible, it is practically impossible to make an accurate diagnosis.

If this position is to be improved then the farmer will want to know what information is likely to be required.

As disease is really only any departure from normal health it is necessary to know what the animal or animals were like when in normal health. The information should therefore include breed, colour, age, sex and condition. In the case of a single animal, temperament may be important and if a female whether pregnant and the duration of pregnancy should be stated. In writing about a dairy cow say when she last calved and how much milk she is giving; with sheep say when last shorn and indicate the length and type of wool carried.

Symptoms should then be described. In the case of wounds, swellings or abscesses indicate their position and shape, whether hot, painful, soft, hard or bony, attached to, or movable under, the skin or whether an impression made by pressing firmly with the finger remains after the finger is removed. With wounds always give their size, shape, depth and the angle to the ground of long cuts. A simple sketch may often be valuable.

Describe carefully any abnormality in the posture of the animal or any of its organs. For example the third eyelid may protrude further over the eye than is normal. Discharges from the eyes, nose, mouth, vagina etc., should be mentioned together with some reference to the type of discharge, e.g. watery, blood-stained, or containing pus.

Any apparent pain should also be mentioned as well as any abnormality in the action of the bowels. Whether the respiration, that is the rate of breathing, is regular or irregular should be stated together with any coughing if noticed.

Following as much in the way of symptoms as can be given the history of course of the complaint should then be detailed. Information required comprises the surroundings of the animal or animals, the weather, food, date when symptoms were first noticed and the course taken by the disease up to the time of writing. Details of any treatment carried out should also be stated.

If writing about animals that have died, the results of any post-mortem examina-
tion that may have been carried out are likely to be valuable but only if carried out fairly soon after death.

Additional details that may be helpful where numbers of animals are involved are the date the first animal became affected and if possible the dates on which subsequent animals were found to be sick or dead, the total number affected, the number of deaths and the number of animals in the flock or head concerned. Always mention if any animals had been introduced prior to the outbreak and if so how long before the first case occurred.

The information required, therefore, is briefly:

(1) Description of the animal or animals.

(2) All abnormalities.

(3) Course of the disease.

(4) Treatment, if attempted.

(5) Details of any post-mortem examinations carried out.

(6) In outbreaks, numbers and dates.

Information along these lines would certainly make it easier for Departmental officers to reply to letters of inquiry and enable the Department to perform a more useful advisory service where it has to be carried out by correspondence.

(From a broadcast talk, republished by courtesy of the Australian Broadcasting Commission).

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NEW MILKING MACHINE SERVICE

The Superintendent of Dairying (Mr. M. Cullity), recently reported on a new service for testing the efficiency of operation of milking machines which is being introduced in Western Australia.

For some time, he said, work being carried out by the Ruakura Research Institute, New Zealand, on the operation of the milking machine, has been followed with great interest, particularly in view of the emphasis placed upon correct milking procedure by overseas workers.

Several years ago a standard vacuum gauge was used to check those installed on several machines throughout the dairying districts when it was demonstrated the latter were not reading correctly. Approval was later granted under the Commonwealth Dairy Extension Grant to procure a vacuum recorder and an airflow meter as designed by the Ruakura research team. These have recently come to hand and are being used in a preliminary survey of machines in the dairy districts.

Mr. G. W. R. Scott, Dairy Instructor, during visits to country districts to inspect the work of Herd Recorders, is visiting three farms in each unit. The results so far achieved have demonstrated decisively that most of the machines need some adjustment, while many are being worked in a grossly inefficient manner. Mr. Scott's investigations will continue with his further visits to the country, and it is expected that his work will assist many farmers in improving the operation of their machines.

On each visit, he makes a routine check of the operation of the machine, measuring the reserve air at various points, the operation of the vacuum pump, the effectiveness of the relief valve, and the operation of the pulsators. A report is left with the farmer setting out the condition of the vacuum pump, the amount of reserve air compared to what it should be, the air consumption, whether satisfactory or not, any error in the vacuum gauge, the effectiveness of the relief valve, the pulsator readings and the adjustments which are recommended. At present it is not practicable to extend this service to all dairy farmers.
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