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ACTINOBACILLOSIS ("Lumpy Jaw")
IN SHEEP

By F. C. WILKINSON, B.V.Sc., Government Veterinary Surgeon

ACTINOBACILLOSIS, or "lumpy jaw" as it is commonly called, is a disease which causes multiple abscess formations in the soft tissues of the head and neck of sheep, particularly around the lower jaw.

The disease has been reported from all States of Australia and is believed to be fairly common in West Australian flocks. Because it seldom occurs in epidemic form and usually only affects a few sheep in a flock, many cases are not reported and it is difficult to assess the overall incidence.

Recent investigations on one property revealed a number of cases however, and shearers reported that similarly-affected sheep were commonly encountered in the district during the summer crutching.

CAUSE

The disease is a bacterial infection caused by the micro-organisms, Actinobacillus lignieresi. These bacteria do not appear to penetrate sound tissue, but enter the system through skin wounds or minor injuries to the lining of the mouth. Many infections in this State appear to originate in injuries caused by grass seeds.

The abscesses may eventually become hard fibrous swellings which, if present in large numbers, may cause malformation and fibrosis of the jaws, making it difficult for the animal to feed. Marked loss of condition, or even death from malnutrition can result from this development.

Mortalities have also resulted from interference with breathing caused by the pressure of large abscesses on the throat.

The abscesses are formed in the soft tissues of the cheeks, nose, lips and throat and may extend to the lymph nodes of the neck. On post-mortem examination they will be found to be enclosed in thickened fibrous capsules.

Another symptom which may or may not accompany the abscess formation is a nasal discharge of "ropey" whitish fluid. On post-mortem examination, a quantity of this fluid will be found in the nasal cavity, and the mucous membranes lining the cavity will be seen studded with raised white patches or pustules containing greenish-yellow pus.

Sheep with the nasal discharge will experience difficulty in breathing. They will tire easily and lag behind the flock when driven.

TREATMENT

For the treatment of affected animals a solution of sodium iodide is recommended.
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It is given as a subcutaneous injection (under the skin), in doses of 30 ccs. of a 10 per cent. solution in water. Treatment should be given once a week and carried out for four or five weeks.

Recovery is not dramatic, and no change may be seen till after the series of weekly injections has been finished. There will be a reduction in the size of the abscesses, which will resolve to leave small fibrous lumps under the skin.

As the affected sheep usually cannot readily obtain food, due to the painful lesions, it is advisable to hand-feed the animals during treatment. This will assist the nutrition and general health of the sheep—so increasing the likelihood of complete recovery following treatment.
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