A control programme for cheesy gland in sheep

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CASEOUS LYMPHADENITIS, or "cheesy gland" as it is usually known in Australia, is a common disease of sheep which is very important in the economics of the lamb and mutton industry.

The health of sheep infected with caseous lymphadenitis (CLA) is not greatly impaired but the lesions caused by the organism are unsightly and intolerable in the carcasses of animals sold for human consumption.

The abscesses occur especially in the body lymph glands and may be found in any other organ or tissue. Of these other sites, the lungs are the most often infected.

A few extensively infected carcasses must be totally condemned but mostly the infected glands and other tissues are trimmed out before the carcass is passed for food use.

Affected carcasses are not acceptable for export. CLA is widespread in Australian sheep and in sheep raised in similar climates and environments in other countries. The older sheep are at time of slaughter, the more likely they are to carry infected glands and tissues. Lambs before the first shearing are rarely, if ever, infected.
In most cases, the infective organisms enter the body through superficial wounds, especially shearing cuts, and for this reason most infections follow shearing. Since the sheep are shorn every year, the prevalence of CLA in a flock is likely to increase steadily with the age of the flock unless control measures are used on the farm.

The superficial lymph glands of the fore and hind limbs are often infected and if these glands rupture and discharge, infective organisms may be spread widely, particularly in sheep sheds, yards and camps where many animals congregate, and on shearing blades.

The organisms may also be discharged in the animal’s droppings.

Where the soil is contaminated the infection is more likely to become established if the soil is also moist. For this reason, the soils of sheep camps which are kept moist by urine, are important sources of infection, particularly if the camps are also sheltered from direct sunlight.

**Control measures**

Much of the control effort must be concentrated on the shearing shed and the shearing operation itself.

**Reduce shearing cuts**

CLA is virtually unknown in United Kingdom sheep and one of the reasons for this is said to be the great care taken in shearing by the shepherds, and the low incidence of shearing cuts. At any rate, the first rule in the control of CLA is to reduce shearing cuts to as few as possible and frequently clean the cutters and combs in hot washing soda.

If possible all cuts should be treated with a disinfectant and certainly the more severe wounds should be treated.

**Clean and disinfect sheds**

Before shearing begins the sheds, including the chutes and counting-out pens should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. Pens should if possible be concreted or at least freshly gravelled.

**Shear youngest first**

To reduce the scope for spread of infection, the lambs should be shorn first and the oldest flocks last. The sheep with enlarged superficial lymph glands and those with obviously discharging glands should be the last shorn and should be yarded separately and isolated from the rest of the mob after shearing.

**Put shorn sheep into clean paddocks**

Shorn sheep should be sent out of the yards onto clean grassy paddocks where sheep have not recently been pastured, and not into working yards or into paddocks containing recently-used sheep camps.

Especially dusty sheep yards may be sprinkled with water to settle the dust.

**Good results are possible**

In parts of the U.S.A. where this disease is also very common, very good results have come out of control programmes of this kind and on some farms, the useful reproductive lives of ewes have been extended two or three years.

A control programme is not difficult and should be economically valuable to the farmer.

If every farmer applied this programme the problem of “cheesy gland” in mutton would be greatly reduced.

Many farmers consider “cheesy gland” unavoidable, but in fact a programme of careful management at shearing or other times when sheep are open to infection, can largely eliminate it.