1-1-1978

New policy hits hard at sheep lice

F C. Wilkinson

Follow this and additional works at: https://researchlibrary.agric.wa.gov.au/journal_agriculture4

Part of the Parasitology Commons, Rural Sociology Commons, and the Sheep and Goat Science Commons

Recommended Citation

Available at: https://researchlibrary.agric.wa.gov.au/journal_agriculture4/vol19/iss3/7

This article is brought to you for free and open access by Research Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 4 by an authorized administrator of Research Library. For more information, please contact jennifer.heathcote@agric.wa.gov.au, sandra.papenfus@agric.wa.gov.au.
IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

This document has been obtained from DAFWA’s research library website (researchlibrary.agric.wa.gov.au) which hosts DAFWA’s archival research publications. Although reasonable care was taken to make the information in the document accurate at the time it was first published, DAFWA does not make any representations or warranties about its accuracy, reliability, currency, completeness or suitability for any particular purpose. It may be out of date, inaccurate or misleading or conflict with current laws, polices or practices. DAFWA has not reviewed or revised the information before making the document available from its research library website. Before using the information, you should carefully evaluate its accuracy, currency, completeness and relevance for your purposes. We recommend you also search for more recent information on DAFWA’s research library website, DAFWA’s main website (https://www.agric.wa.gov.au) and other appropriate websites and sources.

Information in, or referred to in, documents on DAFWA’s research library website is not tailored to the circumstances of individual farms, people or businesses, and does not constitute legal, business, scientific, agricultural or farm management advice. We recommend before making any significant decisions, you obtain advice from appropriate professionals who have taken into account your individual circumstances and objectives.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Agriculture and Food and the State of Western Australia and their employees and agents (collectively and individually referred to below as DAFWA) accept no liability whatsoever, by reason of negligence or otherwise, arising from any use or release of information in, or referred to in, this document, or any error, inaccuracy or omission in the information.
New policy hits hard at sheep lice

By F. C. Wilkinson,
Division of Animal Health

In March 1977 the regulation requiring compulsory routine dipping of all sheep within 30 days of shearing was changed, and only infested flocks were required to be dipped. This change has allowed concentrated eradication efforts.

Sheep lice are the most serious external parasites infesting sheep in Western Australia. A survey of flocks in the South-West Land Division in 1971 revealed that one in ten properties had infested sheep. This was despite many years of compulsory annual treatment with insecticide (dipping).

The Department of Agriculture therefore began to study the problem and the effectiveness of the policy which relied heavily on annual routine dipping and owners reporting infestations.

The main reason lice had not been eradicated, was found to be the difficulty of detecting infestations, controlled by routine dipping, which spread unnoticed to previously free flocks. Added to this about one-third of flocks found with lice failed to eradicate the infestation or became almost immediately reinfested.

Another finding was that dipping was expensive not only because of the cost of the treatment but because of resulting disease such as lumpy wool, arthritis and cheesy gland. It was estimated that, if a farmer did not dip until lice were present (about one year in 10), the loss of income in that year from the infestation would not be as much as the cost of dipping the flock every year.

After discussion with industry representatives the regulations requiring compulsory annual dipping were abolished. Dipping was only required if lice were detected, and infested flocks were to remain in quarantine for at least 100 days after dipping.

It has been feared that some lightly infested flocks where lice had been controlled by inefficient routine dipping, would not dip. These flocks would then become heavily infested, with a consequent large reduction in wool value. However, about 70 per cent of flocks still dipped and the degree of infestation did not change—most had only light infestations.

The number of sheep dipped was higher than expected. However, as confidence in the new programme develops, the percentage of sheep dipped should fall further.

Some farmers saw the apparent increase in lice incidence, indicated by the increased quarantine as a breakdown in the new policy, and reintroduction of compulsory dipping was suggested. However, explanation of the policy has satisfied most objections and at the Annual General Meeting of the Farmers' Union, delegates voted against a motion to reintroduce compulsory routine dipping.

Future

The reluctance of farmers to report lice is disturbing and appears to be due to several reasons including fear of the 100 day quarantine period. However, the benefits of supervised eradication and inspection of neighbouring flocks are now being appreciated and could lead to increased reporting.

If reporting of lice can be increased, detections should again be high in 1978/79 and then gradually decline in succeeding years as further eradication is achieved.

The new programme is continually being monitored and assessed. At this stage it is achieving its aims of decreasing the cost of damage caused by lice to wool and decreasing the major cost of control dipping. Further benefits should accrue as long as all people in the industry accept their responsibility in controlling sheep lice. The full benefits could be expected in about 1982.