Do you know this disease [scabby mouth]

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This sheep is showing rather severe lesions of "scabby mouth" a disease widely distributed in both the pastoral and agricultural areas.

In the flock of 500 ewes in which this sheep was running about half showed scabs along the edges of the lips. Nine sheep also had scabs on the nostrils and muzzle similar to the sheep pictured. Three of these were lame, and had scabs on the skin just above the hoof. The sheep were in good condition and appeared to be grazing in a fairly normal manner.

History
"Scabby mouth" had never been seen on this property before. In August 200 apparently healthy ewes had been purchased and after an isolation period of four weeks placed in with 300 of the owner's own ewes. Two weeks before the owner's call to the Department of Agriculture for help, in December, the 500 ewes had been placed into a paddock containing a lot of tall, dry, barley grass. A visit revealed the above story, with the lesions mainly confined to the owner's original sheep.

Cause of outbreak
It was likely that some of the purchased ewes carried the scabby mouth virus but showed no symptoms. When abrasions occurred in the mouth of the owner's susceptible sheep, due to barley grass seed penetration, the virus was allowed to gain entry and cause the lesions seen.

Action taken
The nine severely infected sheep were drafted off for treatment with an antiseptic ointment rubbed into the scabby area once a day. The rest of the flock were returned to a paddock with fair dry clover feed and given a small amount of wheat daily for two weeks.

Result
A month later no signs of this disease could be seen and the sheep were equal in condition to most in the district. One sheep had been found dead with a grossly swollen head. This was probably due to a secondary "gas gangrene" infection. The owner has been warned that further outbreaks can be expected, especially in next year's lambs.

As the farmer is a fat lamb breeder this could be serious. But he knows that a vaccine is available, and will consider its use if in fact the disease does become an annual problem in his lambs.
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