

Livestock health matters

Buying livestock online?

By Dr Ian Lugton, Bega district vet

It seems that livestock trading is increasingly moving online. But what does buying or selling online through the likes of AuctionsPlus mean for the health of your animals? And what are the potential biosecurity risks to your farming operation?

One advantage of buying online is that animals don't need to be unnecessarily stressed through the process of feed and water deprivation, yarding and additional trucking.

This can provide significant benefits through reducing setbacks, and the occasional, but disastrous development of metabolic diseases, salt poisoning, trucking fever, plant poisonings and the like.

However, when it comes to biosecurity, online purchasing can be something of a double-edged sword.

With stock from different properties held close to one another, saleyards represent a much higher biosecurity risk than purchasing directly off-property due to the risk of animal-to-animal infection. However, buying online prevents the purchaser from inspecting the animals on offer.

When it comes to buying livestock, it's best not to trust photos, videos or even your own eyes. Stock can carry diseases such as Johne's, pestivirus or footrot and pests like lice, often without showing any clinical signs.

One of the main ways for disease, weeds and parasites to enter a property is through new arrivals. For these reasons, a National Vendor Declaration and a vendor

signed animal health statement is good health insurance for your existing herd or flock.

Inspect the animals closely on arrival, before and after unloading. Buyers should not be afraid to insist on the right paperwork, then check it to make sure the animals you have received are the ones you bought. Upload the stock information to the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) database – as an online or private buyer this is your responsibility.

It is important to properly isolate, monitor, test or treat new stock before introducing them to the rest of the herd or flock – we recommend a period of ten days. This will allow many signs of disease to emerge and for the animals to empty their stomachs of any weeds or seeds they may be carrying.

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District vet from Bega Ian Lugton investigating deaths in cattle due to Theileriosis on a farm in the Milton area.

Disease surveillance and mortality investigation is one of the important functions of the LHPA which helps to ensure that any emerging or emergency diseases are recognised early. Call your nearest office of the LHPA if you need assistance in investigating unusual stock health issues or puzzling mortality events.

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For more information about a topic in this newsletter, to obtain a copy of a previous newsletter, or for livestock health advice, contact your local South East LHPA district livestock health staff:

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Ranger Phil McGrath holds a guinea fowl ready for an injection with tuberculin.

Avian tuberculosis in turkeys

Smart action by a ratepayer has resulted in avian tuberculosis (TB) being diagnosed in a flock of turkeys near Braidwood.

The ratepayer noticed that a turkey's liver was not normal so she took it to her vet who agreed, and sent the liver off for testing. It came back as avian tuberculosis, a notifiable disease.

Braidwood district vet, Dr Bob Templeton sought information on the pathways to the disease freedom. TB testing would be allowed with positive animals being culled and retesting would occur in six months.

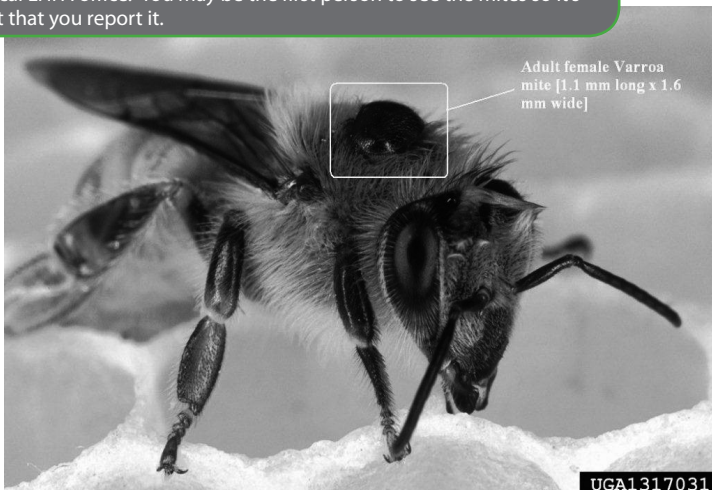
Just like the old TB testing of years ago the birds were skin tested with tuberculin on a Monday and read on a Friday. The turkeys were free-ranging with some guinea fowl. Both groups were tested.

Three birds were diagnosed as being infected despite having no visible signs of TB. They were slaughtered, with the rest of the flock to be retested in April.

Avian tuberculosis is a zoonotic disease and so Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) consisting of overalls, gloves and face masks were worn.

The dark lump highlighted by the arrow above is a varroa mite on the bee.

Healthy bees have a smooth clean back or thorax. If you see anything like the lump on the bee in the picture please catch the affected bee in a jar (if you can do so safely) and contact Bob Templeton on 48422536 or 0427422539 or your local LHPA office. You may be the first person to see the mites so it's important that you report it.



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Quarantine drenching, mineral supplementation and vaccinating in this period is also recommended. However, don't do this immediately on arrival. Let the stock feed and water and settle in first for a day or two before further stressing them by handling.

To achieve real quarantine you require a buffer. The surrounding yards or paddocks must be free of animals or the isolation area must be double fenced - there should be no nose-to-nose contact.

Before buying online, you can obtain more detailed biosecurity advice from your LHPA or private vet or from www.farmbiosecurity.com.au.

Look out for varroa mites on bees

By Dr Bob Templeton,
Braidwood district vet

I had a good conversation with Urita bee keeper Des Cannon about varroa mite, the most damaging and most likely invader among the diseases of bees currently exotic to Australia.

We both agreed that the worst thing that could happen if the mite reached Australia was that it would be around for a long time before it was actually discovered.

When the small hive beetle arrived in 2002 it was here for quite some time before detection, and so it became widespread. It was then impossible to eradicate.

We may be able to find varroa earlier if everyone looks out for it. If we detect it soon after arrival we will be in the best position for an eradication campaign.

Looking out for varroa mite is simple. All you have to do is take a close look at the bees in your garden and look for any "lumps" on the bee's back (see pic on left).

Varroa mites severely weaken all bees that become infected and cause the collapse of hives. That will not only affect honey production, but will also profoundly reduce the pollination of many different plant species currently worth \$15 billion.

This simple insect observation could save the country from a serious pest, so please keep a look out.

Black scour worms

By Jane Weller, veterinary student, University of Sydney

I have been lucky enough to have had the opportunity to work with the Braidwood office of South East LHPA as part of my final year vet training.

In that time, I experienced a lot of rain in Braidwood. Although rain brings good, productive pasture, it also brings significant worm problems for sheep.

This is the time of the year for black scour worm in sheep, and after significant rainfall this little parasite may become a huge problem on your

farm.

By now you should have done your first summer drench and some worm tests so you should be aware which worms are a problem or if there is a problem. Worm tests should also be done before carrying out the second summer drench in February and then you only need to drench if necessary.

Points to remember:

- Consider rotating drench families each time you drench to reduce formation of resistance, or use combinations. Consult your LHPA vet if you are unsure what to use.
- Check for resistance – drench tests

can be done by doing a worm test 14 days after drenching to see if any worms have survived. If the drench hasn't worked then a different drench should be used in the future.

- Worm tests – assess the need for drenching, before drenching unnecessarily. If there are few eggs, then you don't need to drench.

Weaning will usually occur over summer so it is necessary to drench these animals again and move them to a clean pasture. Further drenching may need to occur after eight weeks but this should significantly reduce the worm burden in the weaners.

Watch out for simple errors in NLIS

The South East LHPA often receives reports from Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) regarding errors that occur within the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS).

These errors occur when there is a missing link in the chain of movement of cattle and as a result the affected animal or animals will lose their life-time traceability.

With constant monitoring, a few trends and common errors have been revealed. The good news is that these can easily be fixed if cattle owners are just a little more vigilant before making the movement.

One of the most common errors occurs when one owner has two or more PICs (Property Identification Codes), registered. As a result, the owner will have two Vendor Declaration Books. Cattle from one PIC will be sold or transferred using the wrong Vendor Declaration, which creates a systems error and the loss of life traceability.

If you are in this situation and cattle are moved regularly between properties it may be worthwhile thinking about amalgamating the PICs and only having a single PIC.

Another common error is occurring with family-run farms, where the parents have had a PIC and the children on the same property have also registered a PIC.

Please be aware that the PIC is a property identification code and not an ownership code. One parcel of land cannot have two PICs.

Cattle moving to and from a property



on agistment, cattle owners reading tags manually and recording incorrect numbers also created a reasonable number of systems errors. Property to property movements after private sales also creates problems - remember it is the purchaser that is responsible for transferring the cattle on the database.

Whatever the reason for the system error it seems that the majority are very simple errors. People have set out to do the correct thing and have sometimes not known that they have created the error.

One easy way to monitor the movement of cattle on and off your property is to have an NLIS account and make use of it. It is a simple process to check the database for

such movements.

If you have any trouble the using the NLIS database, contact the MLA Help Desk on 1800 654 743. You can also contact your local LHPA office and one of the rangers can assist.

While it is considered that compliance in regard to movement of cattle and the recording on the NLIS database is high, there is always room for improvement. It is you, the cattle owner, that can achieve this by giving that little extra thought to the movement of the cattle.

If you have any doubt about what you are doing, please take the time to make that phone call and get it right. We have the people who are willing to help.

Widespread selenium deficiency can be managed

By Dr Bob Templeton, Braidwood district veterinarian

The southern tablelands are renowned for their selenium deficient soils. However, there are some properties that do not have a selenium deficiency in their soils, and supplementation on these blocks may lead to selenium toxicity. It is best to know exactly what you are doing and why.

Selenium deficiency can have major effects on your livestock's health. It can also be exacerbated by the use of superphosphate on your pastures.

Superphosphate is made by treating rock phosphate with sulphuric acid, therefore it contains a lot of sulphur. The use of superphosphate results in a build up of sulphur in the soil. The sulphur then competes with selenium for uptake by the pasture plants. This means the plant absorbs the sulphur first and leaves the selenium behind. In a selenium deficient soil this makes the selenium content of any pasture plant much worse.

A sign of selenium deficiency in cattle is the sight of a bleached winter coat between the front and back legs around December. In selenium supplemented cattle all the coat is shed quickly in spring.

You can test your animals for their selenium levels by getting a blood sample and asking for a glutathione peroxidase (GSHPx) test for around \$11.00 per test.

Apart from the obvious coat problems, selenium deficiency can cause infertility and muscular problems in cattle. Poor growth and ill thrift is a common sign of the deficiency. Proper immune function also requires adequate selenium.

Recently a Bungendore herd had 200 first calf heifers calve down successfully. However, 180 out of the 200 calves did

not grow as expected. The remaining 20 grew normally. There were also problems with Pestivirus infection that were more sporadic in nature. A sample of cows and calves showed a selenium deficiency. After oral selenium supplementation, the affected calves have caught up to the "normal" calves.

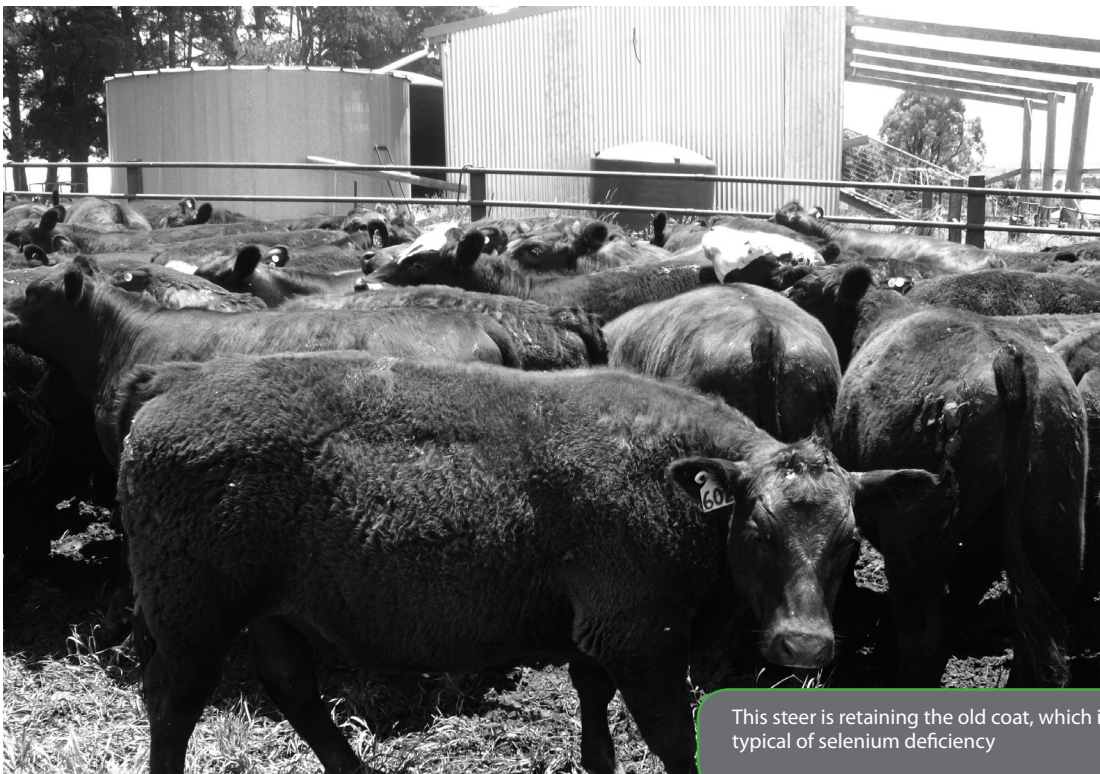
In sheep, the classic white muscle disease is commonly seen. The white muscle is commonly seen in the hamstring muscles and in the muscles of the heart.

Lambs and other young sheep are commonly affected. Often they will simply sit down due to the weakness in their leg muscles. Occasionally the lambs may die suddenly if their heart muscles are affected.

There are a number of treatments available for selenium deficiency. They can be divided into short-acting and long-acting supplements. Selenium with vaccines or drenches is usually short-acting. It may provide relief but has no lasting effect. "Oral Selenium Concentrate" (Agvantage®) will give two to three months activity. Long lasting "Deposel" (Novartis®) is good for 24 months in sheep and cattle. Selenium bullets give about 12 months supply of selenium in cattle but longer in sheep (up to three years).

Selenium deficiency is widespread, also occurring on the coastal strip. Once you know about it, you can manage it.

DISCLAIMER: The discussion of an animal health product within this newsletter should not be taken as a specific endorsement for such a product. Mention of these products or their uses is for information purposes and to draw attention to their existence in the marketplace.



This steer is retaining the old coat, which is typical of selenium deficiency