

BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB Newsflash – 12/2/2010

This Newsflash email is funded by [Australian Wool Innovation](#) and [Department of Primary Industries](#).

Visit the BWBL website to see the latest coordinator CV and group description - congratulations Kate and her BWBL Euroa Grazing Group.

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[**Making More from Sheep**](#)

WHEN: Wednesday 17 Feb at 5.00pm

WHERE: Maryborough Highland Society, Maryborough

The Maryborough Regional BWBL group is hosting an open meeting with the theme 'Making more from sheep' with guest speaker John Webb-Ware from the Melbourne University, Veterinary School, McKinnon Project. The late afternoon meeting will start at 5pm on Wednesday 17th Feb at the Maryborough Highland Society in Maryborough. John will present information on the profitability of sheep enterprise alternatives. This will be followed by dinner and further discussions on the topic of increasing sheep profitability.

Non members are invited to this meeting. Cost for non-members is \$20 plus the meal.

Contact Kieran Ransom at DPI Bendigo 54 304 451 to register your interest.

[**The Managing Pastures for Climate Change Information Day**](#)

WHEN: Friday 26th February 2010 at 9.00am

WHERE: Whorouly Recreation Reserve

Speakers on the day will include John Mulvany, Jim Virgona, Tim McNamara, Geoff Millar, Kate Sargeant, Local producers and Tim Ekberg

Topics Include:

- How perennial pastures have survived the drought
- The cost of sowing a perennial pasture
- Managing phalaris to improve persistence and production

- Weed control to improve perennial pasture density and prepare paddocks for sowing
- Pasture cropping options for north east Victoria
- Winter fodder crop options
- Pasture sowing for success
- Grazing management to improve production and persistence

Contact Tim Ekberg - Phone 03 5727 3931 or Mobile 0427 573 535

February Rains Bring Risk of Staggers

Early February rains have increased the risk of ryegrass staggers in sheep flocks. Caused by a fungus that grows on perennial ryegrass, ryegrass staggers can be fatal and is the Australian sheep industry's fifth costliest disease.

Department of Primary Industries Sheep Disease Surveillance Project Leader Robert Suter said farmers should monitor their sheep frequently and walk mobs for a short distance looking for sheep beginning to show signs of staggering.

Mildly affected sheep develop tremors which are exaggerated by any excitement. If any staggering is detected, action must be taken to prevent these sheep from dying. In mild cases of staggers, the mob should be left undisturbed or quietly drifted off the toxic pasture to a safer paddock. Supplementary feeding can also slow the outbreak in some cases.

Mobs where affected sheep are found should be regularly monitored, and if too many are being affected the mob should be moved to a safer pasture or confinement fed. "As the toxicosis worsens, animals lose coordination, develop a stiff gait, are unable control of their direction of movement, collapse and even experience convulsions. Seriously affected sheep must be removed from the toxic pasture and provided with food and water. It is important that they are kept quiet and in an area where they cannot injure themselves.

You Can Help

Perennial ryegrass is the most commonly sown pasture grass in Australia. Perennial ryegrass toxicosis (PRGT) is caused by a tiny fungus that lives in the plant, and helps ryegrass persist over summer.

Meat & Livestock Australia has developed a research program to learn more about controlling this disease. Preliminary studies into stored pasture samples taken during periods of PRGT have indicated that further pasture sample testing is warranted for some novel metabolites of endophytes.

Dr Kevin Reed, pasture research agronomist is involved with this research, and is seeking reports of PRGT cases/outbreaks, so that fresh pasture samples can be collected.

With the recent summer rain, there is an increased risk of PRGT. In support of this research project, DPI is asking producers to report any significant cases of ryegrass staggers to their local DPI Animal Health staff or to Dr Kevin Reed who can be contacted by email on rps@eftel.com or 0419 565 520

The Buzz on Flystrike Management

Sheep producers looking for additional flystrike management information and measures can now refer to the "Producers' Corner" on the Sheep CRC website.

Information on seasonal planning, breeding strategies, ram selection and day-to-day management has been compiled by leading scientists and researchers, and is available at www.sheepcrc.org.au

The information built up by the Sheep CRC focuses on an integrated approach based on using shorter-term management measures while breeding a more breech strike resistant flock.

Piping Projects & Growing Grain

WHEN: Wednesday 24 Feb at 5.00pm to 9.00pm

WHERE: St Arnaud Country Club, St Arnaud - Dinner provided

Exploring and assessing opportunities from the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline eg lamb finishing. What do you need to consider?

Demonstration of decision support tool

Interactive discussion with state grain breeders

Panel discussion

Register by Friday 19th Feb with Cameron Morrison on 5495 1700

Getting Greener Grass

Grain growers who also run livestock on their properties are being encouraged to think how perennial pastures could fit into their cropping system.

Perennial pastures offer green feed at different times throughout the year - some varieties in spring and summer and others during the autumn feed gap when farmers are buying in supplementary feed.

The main cost of switching to perennials is the initial start up cost of planting as well as the time until it is ready for grazing, which can be longer than an annual species. Prospects for Perennials, a new publication from the Future Farms CRC provides background into different perennials, how they can be managed in farming systems and a cost benefit analysis.

It can be downloaded or ordered from www.futurefarmcra.com.au

Facial Eczema Raises its Head

With the wet, humid weather we have been experiencing in Victoria, livestock producers can anticipate unusual disease outbreaks, such as those caused by fungi. One such disease to be on the lookout for is facial eczema.

Department of Primary Industries (DPI) District Veterinary Officer Jeff Cave said facial eczema is a type of sunburn (photosensitization) affecting exposed areas of pale skin of sheep and cattle.

In Victoria, the disease occurs mainly in the irrigation country of Gippsland, although occasionally cases have been reported in the north. The disease is most common from February to April following warm, moist conditions of 72 hours or more. A toxin called 'sporidesmin', which is produced on pasture litter by the fungus *Pithomyces chartarum*, causes facial eczema when it is ingested by stock grazing on the pasture. The toxin is absorbed from the intestine and reaches the liver, where it causes severe damage.

The damaged liver is not capable of metabolising the byproducts of pasture digestion at the normal rate and these accumulate in the blood. Some of these chemicals react to sunlight where the skin is thin or pale, causing photosensitization. All the outward signs of facial eczema result from the liver damage caused by sporidesmin. The disease in stock may be seen between seven and 20 days of grazing the toxic spores from the pasture.

Dr Cave said given suitable temperature and moisture conditions, the fungus grows in clusters on the paddock and is normally not visible to the naked eye. It multiplies by producing millions of spores, which are coated with the toxin. Freshly produced spores are the most toxic. If fungal growth stops after a change in the weather, the residual spores on the pasture lose their toxicity within one or two weeks. The fungus grows on the litter of most pasture plants but it grows best on perennial ryegrass litter. When the fungus reaches toxic levels, animals grazing short pasture at high stocking rates are at greatest risk.

Effective control of facial eczema is achieved on at-risk farms by monitoring spore numbers on the pasture. Spore counts vary dramatically from farm to farm and paddock to paddock, according to aspect, elevation, prevailing winds, pasture litter and height.

If facial eczema is suspected, a veterinary practitioner should be called and affected animals should be immediately sheltered from direct sunlight. For further information please contact your local veterinarian or DPI Veterinary or Animal Health Officer, or in NSW your Livestock Health and Pest Authority.

Climate Change

The CSIRO is providing comprehensive, rigorous science to help Australia understand, respond to and plan for a changing climate. Visit www.csiro.au/science/Climate-Change to read about the latest research.

Drought Apprenticeship Retention Bonus now Available

The Drought Apprenticeship Retention Bonus (DARB) is now available for eligible businesses located in exceptional circumstances (EC) declared areas. DARB is a \$1.9 million dollar drought initiative administered by DPI that provides grants of up to \$1,500 per apprentice to eligible farm businesses and those that support primary producers, such as mechanics, metal fabricators and farm supplies businesses. Apprentices must be in a designated employment category. This program helps businesses retain their apprentices and recognises the flow-on effect of the drought. In 2009, businesses received funding to retain over 1,400 apprentices across Victoria through the DARB initiative.

Applications for DARB close on the 1 March 2010. Businesses seeking more information DARB should visit the [Drought pages on the DPI website](#) or contact the Drought Information Line on 136 186.

2010 Apprentice of the Year Nominations Close Soon

Applications for the 2010 VFF/Elders Insurance Young Agricultural Apprentice of the Year Award are closing soon. Applications are sought from full or part-time Certificate 3 or 4 apprentices from chicken meat, egg, dairy, grain, horticulture, livestock and pig industries. The winner will win the latest Honda CTX200A valued at more than \$5000. Every applicant will receive a VFF student membership for one year. Marcus Oldham is providing two scholarships to the one-week Rural Leadership Program - one for the winner and the runner up. To be eligible to apply you need to have completed the Certificate 3 or 4 requirements in the 12 months prior to December 31, 2009.

Applications close February 19. For more information or a nomination form please contact VFF Membership Services on 1300 882 833.

Students at school were asked to write about the harmful effects of oil in fish. One 11 year old wrote, "When my mum opened a tin of sardines last night it was full of oil and all the sardines were dead."

Have a good weekend, Annette
BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB Administrator