



The WeCAHN small ruminants network met Feb. 8th 2024 with veterinary practitioners, producers, provincial veterinarians, diagnosticians, and researchers in attendance, discussing the small ruminant health events of Q4 (October–December) 2023.

Interesting cases

1. Lambs with abnormal legs and neurological problems

VET COMMENT: [Our practice is] unsure if new, undiagnosed cause of joint problems in aborted lambs is more common recently.

QUESTION: How often do you hear about these types of cases, or see them?

ANSWER 1: Clients see them mostly sporadically. Some of these lambs may make it to term, and if so [here in Alberta], Cache Valley virus is the first thing I would think of. We don't worry about getting a lab diagnosis if:

- These abnormalities are sporadic as opposed to clustered [in time].
- There are normal siblings.
- The “rule of three” hasn't been triggered yet. I tell my clients to collect any abortions (including placenta) or abnormal lambs, bag them carefully, and freeze them. When the third one occurs, bring them all to the clinic, with the third case still fresh, for lab submission.

ANSWER 2: we tend to see this kind of thing very sporadically. We suggest they freeze the first one and let us know if/when more occur.

ANSWER 3: same for us. We're most likely to actually see them ourselves if they result in birthing problems. Most likely the owner will view these as an oddity and just record them as congenital deformity.



ANSWER 4: similar situation for us. We are more concerned with clusters.

ANSWER 5: Our practice served a very large commercial sheep flock. Our standing SOP with them was to collect abortions including placenta, freeze them, and bring them to clinic when the number rose to 2% of ewes.

Cache Valley virus

Seroprevalence study: 47/50 sheep flocks sampled in Saskatchewan had one or more seropositive sheep.

Deformities associated with CVV in lambs: Of 6 scientific studies reporting deformities caused by CVV in infected lambs, problems reported:

- abnormal/stiff joints (n = 5 studies)
- crooked backs (n = 5)
- crooked necks (n = 5)
- brain malformations (n = 3)
- muscle abnormalities (n = 3)



QUESTION: How frequently do you think clinical clusters of these syndromes (abortion/birth of lambs with congenital anomalies) happens? Commonly? Rarely?

ANSWER 1: we see an increasing number of flocks moving to adjusted lambing seasons and concurrent with that think we see more of these reports. At the moment our office (provincial industry association) hears of about half a dozen flocks per year. Seems to be more the early-lambing flocks which is likely driven by the sensitive period in pregnancy for congenital defects.

Public notice from the Office of the Chief Provincial Veterinarian of Alberta: Cache Valley virus infection in sheep confirmed in Alberta Feb. 2024.

Diarrhea and mortality in goats.

History: Significant death over several months. Kid crop this year (39/60). Both kids and mature animals are dying. Goats get diarrhea then decline. On a pellet ration (medicated beef grower with coccidiostat @ 72mg/kg). No medications appear to help them. Owner has tried calf scour boluses, Vitamin AD3 Forte, blackleg vaccine, antimicrobials in water and by injection.

Diagnostics: Kidney and liver damage, fluid in lungs.

Potential problems with feeding beef pellet: Feeding twice cattle dose of coccidiostat. Copper level in pellet likely to be too high for goats .

Potential problems with case management:

Animals with diarrhea tend to be dehydrated; administering some antimicrobials to dehydrated animals could create toxicity responsible for some of these lesions.

What's the goat dose for the calf scour bolus being used?

Reproductive disease

For purposes of the vet clinical impressions surveys, Rarely = 1-2 times from July - September 2023; Commonly= 1-2 times per month; Very frequently = 3+ times per month.

Across nutritionally-associated reproductive disease, network practitioners reported seeing energy/calorie disease never to Very frequently, and reproductive disease associated with water quality never to Rarely, with energy/calorie deficiency also rated **Increasing** by one vet. Condition scoring is a simple method for assessing the condition, or fat cover, of an animal, to guide feeding management at each stage of production([https://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agdex9622/\\$FILE/bcs-sheep.pdf](https://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agdex9622/$FILE/bcs-sheep.pdf))

QUESTION: given the drought last year on the prairies, how frequently do producers condition score their animals?

ANSWER 1:

- In big flocks they will also use an electronic scale, but in small flocks without that kind of equipment condition scoring is crucial.
- Important to stress that you can't score sheep based on appearance unless they have recently been shorn!
- If they are being hand-fed you can just touch a few backs when they gather around you to be fed.
- You also need to temper scoring based on breed [some breeds such as Suffolk tend to be bigger].

ANSWER 2: it's a point for producer education. Mostly small flocks to be at one end of the spectrum or the other (fat or skinny), with fewer in the middle, relative to commercial flocks.

Meeting takeaways

Collect, freeze, and submit abortions to the lab based on the “rule of three”.

Don't feed beef supplements to sheep or goats without checking with your vet, since the level of copper and possibly other ingredients will likely be inappropriate if not toxic.

Don't medicate dehydrated animals without checking with your vet: some medications may make their condition significantly worse (e.g. sulfa drugs in dehydrated animals).

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