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HAVE YOU BOUGHT MUTTON DRESSED AS LAMB? THE COST OF FOOTROT

Central West Local Land Services District Veterinarians continue to diagnose virulent footrot in sheep throughout the region.

District Veterinarian, Dr Erica Kennedy said the Central West Local Land Services Biosecurity team has been working nearly full time on footrot for the past 10 months.

“Our District Vets and Biosecurity staff are working extraordinarily hard to maintain the state’s footrot protected status.” Dr Kennedy said.

NSW currently maintains a footrot protected status, meaning that the flock prevalence of virulent footrot in the state is less than 1%.

Virulent footrot is caused by the bacteria *Dichelobacter nodosus* and is notifiable under the *Stock Diseases Act 1923*.

Any landholder, land manager, agent or veterinarian who suspects that footrot is present in a mob they have seen or have been consulted about is legally obliged to notify a District Veterinarian within 48hrs: Failure to notify can result in regulatory action being taken.

Signs of footrot include lame sheep, inflammation of the skin between the toes and underrunning of the sole and heel of the foot. In some more severe cases sheep will lie down, walk on their knees and lose weight.

Once virulent footrot it’s diagnosed on a property, immediate action is taken to limit spread and trace the source. The property is quarantined and an eradication plan developed. This can include total or partial destocking in conjunction with foot bathing, paring and inspecting sheep until the disease is gone, a process that in some cases can take years.

This creates a tremendous amount of work as investigation involves checking additional properties for signs of the disease as well as stock movements for at least the past two years.

“It’s likely that the increased prevalence of footrot in our district is due to producers buying in infected sheep and has been exacerbated by the prolonged wet weather in winter and spring last year,”

“Purchasing stock online certainly has its benefits; though when it comes to animal disease more often than not buyers don’t realise that there’s a problem until it’s too late. This isn’t the only method of purchase where we suspect footrot has been brought onto a property; however it features in many of our cases over the last few months” Dr Kennedy said.

Producers are encouraged to be vigilant when trading sheep or goats, ensure they are buying from reputable sources and request and examine the health statement closely before the stock arrive on farm.

It’s also a good idea to isolate newly introduced sheep or goats, and ensure they are healthy with no signs of lameness before integrating them into the main mob.

All producers should also concentrate on keeping fences in good condition to ensure straying sheep or goats are excluded.

If you witness lame sheep or goats or any other signs of footrot, call your nearest Central West Local Land Services District Veterinarian.

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Image: Sheep showing signs of footrot