Animal health advice for producers in the Hunter

NLIS reminder

Producers are reminded of the importance of updating the NLIS database of any Property to Property (P2P) movements of cattle.

The current drought has seen an increase in cattle on the move seeking adequate pastures on agistment or lease properties. All P2P transfers of livestock need to be updated on the NLIS database within two days of movement. The owner or receiver of cattle is legally responsible for ensuring that the transfer is recorded on the NLIS.

While we recognise this is a busy and stressful time for all producers, producers must still ensure they meet their responsibility with regards to the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) database.

NLIS is Australia’s system for the identification and tracing of livestock. Full traceability of livestock from paddock to plate is demanded by both international and domestic markets as an important step in food safety. Our traceability system is the reason why we can give buyers guarantees our produce is clean and green. This system is, in many respects responsible for our continued market success, product price and market demand.

Livestock traceability is also a crucial aspect of Australia’s Biosecurity system. If an exotic Emergency Animal Disease such as Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) was to make its way to Australia, the NLIS system is the most important tool we have to quickly and effectively contain the disease.

In that awful situation, speed is of the essence. Authorities need to be able to very quickly trace livestock movements to be able to contain the disease. Any delay in this, such as livestock movements not kept up to date on the NLIS database could have catastrophic effects on our livestock industry. A notification of FMD, would close our markets instantly and cost Australia billions of dollars in lost product sales, however, if we can trace and contain the disease quickly, we can hopefully limit its affects and get farming communities back on track. A FMD outbreak could make the impact of drought seem small in comparison.

If moving livestock, the owner or receiver of the cattle must update the NLIS system within two days if;

- Buying cattle privately ie on Auctions Plus,
- Moving cattle to and from a leased property
- Moving cattle to and from an agistment property
- Any other movements irrespective of whether or not the cattle are sold.

Movement of cattle to and from a saleyard, stock event or abattoir are treated differently as they are recorded by the facility’s operator.

Gaps in traceability, loss of lifetime traceability and other contraventions of NLIS, when detected by the database are flagged and monitored by DPI and LLS.

An NLIS account can be setup at www.nliscom.au For assistance with NLIS queries please call NLIS on 1800 654 743 or email support@nlis.com.au
Drought-associated livestock health issues

Metabolic disease in pregnant cows

Quite a few heavily pregnant cows in the Hunter have become recumbent with ‘protein-energy malnutrition’ and/or pregnancy toxaemia. Many of these cows did not recover, despite attempts at treatment.

**Cause:** Inadequate feed quantity and quality causes this problem. In some cases the energy content of feed bought in by the owner was lower than had been claimed or estimated, resulting in a feed ration with insufficient energy for cows in the later stages of pregnancy.

**Prevention:** Those buying feed from new and untried sources should consider sending samples away for feed analysis to enable more reliable calculation of suitable feed rations. It is very important not to let late pregnant and lactating cows lose too much body condition.


Blackleg

A number of blackleg outbreaks occurred in late winter.

**Cause:** It is theorised that cattle (and sheep and goats) swallow blackleg spores when grazing an area where another animal has died from blackleg and decomposed. Perhaps during drought cattle are more susceptible to picking up these spores because they are grazing so close to the ground. Perhaps the pasture might also be a bit sweeter in patches that have previously been ‘fertilised’ by decomposition of a carcase. Blackleg spores can remain viable in the soil for many years.

**Prevention:** Vaccinate with 5-in-1 (or 7-in-1) vaccine against clostridial diseases. It is important to make sure that you follow the manufacturer’s recommendation and give the animal two initial doses to generate protection against the clostridial diseases (blackleg, tetanus, black disease, gas gangrene and enterotoxaemia). A single vaccination is not enough to protect the animal. Moreover, protection against enterotoxaemia (also called ‘pulpy kidney’) is not long-lasting, and requires vaccination as often as every three months. Enterotoxaemia is a risk when changing a ruminant’s diet, especially when changing from plain pasture to something richer such as grain, pellets, or oats pasture. This is exactly the situation that occurs when drought-feeding livestock. Regular vaccination with 5-in-1 vaccine is therefore a wise management practice when hand-feeding, especially if forced to chop and change feed types.


Parasite burdens (worms and liver fluke)

We have had numerous cases of malnourished young cattle where heavy parasite burdens were contributing to the animal’s emaciation. Quite a few of these animals became recumbent and died.

**Cause:** Malnourished livestock, particularly sheep, goats and young cattle, are particularly susceptible to parasite burdens. When drought conditions force cattle and sheep to graze low and eat every bit of available pasture, they pick up all the worm larvae contaminating that pasture. Additionally, because livestock heavily graze any remaining patches of green feed during a drought, they tend to pick up liver fluke in drying swamps and in the run off areas below dams.

**Prevention:** Provide adequate nutrition for young cattle and institute drenching programs for worms and fluke during drought.


**Warning:** tick diseases are prevalent in the Hunter region

Cattle producers should be aware that recent Spring rain has created favourable conditions for ticks. As a result, numerous cases of theileriosis and tick paralysis have occurred throughout the Hunter region.

Theileriosis is a disease of cattle caused by a blood parasite carried by the common bush tick. These parasites damage red blood cells, and affected cattle become anaemic. Young calves and heavily pregnant cows are at greatest risk, particularly if they have recently been introduced into the region from further west. Affected animals are weak and lethargic, and cannot tolerate exertion. No treatment other than blood transfusion has proved to be effective. Owners should manage affected animals by ensuring easy access to water, feed and shade. Cattle producers in the Upper Hunter should be aware that distribution of the theileria parasite seems to have increased, and it is no longer mostly restricted to the more coastal areas. Infected animals have been detected this year from Moonan right across to Merriwa.

Paralysis ticks have also been active in the region, and have caused multiple calf deaths from tick paralysis in the Lower Hunter and Manning areas. **Prevention:** Removal of the offending ticks and treatment of the affected calf with tick anti-venom is often effective if attempted early enough, but can be expensive. Preventative measures include calving in...
clean paddocks free of scrub and blady grass (habitat for the wildlife that play host to paralysis ticks), and treating newborn calves with some form of tick control.

More information about these diseases can be found at the following links:


Farmers Beware: The Pitfalls Of Funny Feeds

Farmers searching for drought feed for hungry livestock are urged to beware of the potential problems that could be caused by unusual feed stuffs. With traditional feed supplies of hay and grain running low, Senior Lands Services Officer, Brett Littler, has been inundated with inquiries about unusual sources of stock feed.

According to Brett there is potential for very serious consequences when it comes to some of the feed stuffs being peddled, particularly through social media outlets.

“Funny feeds like onions, potatoes and watermelons have all been advertised as alternative feed sources, but these options can be deadly for sheep and cattle,” warned Brett.

Onions are toxic to cattle when fed in larger quantities than 1.5 kg per head, while potatoes and turnips are a choking risk for livestock. With other fruits and vegetables, very low dry matter content can make these crops unsuitable as livestock feed, as livestock are unable to consume large enough quantities to supply their energy needs.

“I’ve recently seen watermelons offered on Facebook possibly by people with good intentions trying to help farmers out but they need to understand that the water content is so high that cattle fed only water melon as a ration would starve to death.”

Fruit and vegetables with low dry matter content can also be deceptively expensive. “I had a call about cabbages being sold at $570 a tonne delivered, but the dry matter cost worked out to be over $5000 a tonne, not to mention the other issues,” said Brett.

Other issues include the risk of moulds, and also unregistered chemical residues from crops grown for human consumption. Although chemicals used on vegetables may be safe for humans, if they are not registered for use with livestock there is no allowable maximum residue level in meat, creating a residue hazard which could threaten export markets.

“I’ve lost count of the number of strange feeds I’ve been asked about recently, everything from liquorice, cakes and biscuits to carrots and oranges,” said Brett Littler.

Brett advises the high sugar content in confectionary products can create a laxative effect in animals, and pose a risk for glycosis disease, while carrots can cause animal fat to turn yellow and become runny after slaughter. In severe cases, if the fat fails to set, the carcass will be condemned.

Brett Littler urges farmers to talk to someone who understands nutritional requirements of stock before feeding unusual products to livestock.

“Given the potential problems related to these ‘funny feeds’, and the low levels of dry matter, in most cases it’s likely cheaper and safer to buy grain which is still widely available.”

“Even top quality hay is selling for less than $500 a tonne of dry matter, while grain is worth under $500 a tonne, and it’s the dry matter content that counts,” said Brett.

For further advice on livestock feed contact your nearest Local Land Services vet.
Drought response—early weaning

Looking at the seasonal conditions forecast for the next three months, drought conditions are set to continue, especially in the Upper Hunter and increasingly in the Lower Hunter and Manning Great Lakes.

Late winter and spring calving cows are feeling the stress of increased energy requirements for late pregnancy and lactation, especially those on full hand feeding. Variable quality of available hay and increasing difficulty in sourcing high energy supplements such as cotton seed, grain or pellets as well as unusual feeds such as almond hulls, rice hulls and palm kernel extract have made meeting dietary requirements for cows in this stage of production extremely difficult. Many cows have slipped in condition and are at fat score 1-2.

Critical decision making now is based around which class of livestock you are committed to keeping, if any, and how best to maximize the return on your dollar spent on feeding. Cows with calves at foot will require approximately double the feed of a dry cow.

The focus of early weaning is threefold—

• By splitting the cow/calf unit you decrease the total feed required to approximately 2/3 - 3/4 that of a lactating cow. (a significant dollar saving)

• By removing the calf from the cow you can have the cow on an increasing plane of nutrition and increase the chance of your lighter cows going back in calf and improve next year’s production. (under fat score of three fertility is decreased)

• You can give yourself more choices as your decision making goes ahead. These could include

1. Sell cows in improving condition and feed calves – cheaper and can feed for longer for the same amount of money

2. Sell calves either straight away or into the future for cash flow

3. Sell steers and concentrate on heifers as either replacement breeders, to sell as fat stock or in calf heifers if conditions remain tight.

Early weaning requires organization, commitment and attention to detail but can be done very successfully with the benefits to the cow rapidly realized. Before beginning weaning it is important to know you have the feed confirmed/on farm, good water supply and suitable yards with plenty of individual access to feeders available. Previous exposure to feed can improve calves’ acceptance of the new diet. Making sure that animals are grouped by size/weight will improve outcomes as well. Vaccination with, at minimum, 5 in 1 is essential and close attention to individuals that are quiet, hanging back from feed or off on their own, and therefore likely to be unwell, will also yield better results.

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Detailed feed requirements for different age/weights of weaners, as well as options for management can be discussed with LLS staff.

Remember, drought management is about decision making on an ongoing basis. Early weaning is one of the options available that can provide multiple benefits. What we are all trying to avoid is running into welfare issues where there are no feasible options. Cows with calves at foot can rapidly decline to the point where they are no longer fit to travel if not fed sufficiently. If no further feed is available due to supply or financial difficulty this can be catastrophic for livestock and producers alike.

Hunter LLS is committed to help support producers through this drought and can provide information/expertise in livestock nutrition and health, as well as assistance in accessing subsidies from the Rural Assistance Authority.

The District Vet team frequently holds information sessions for producers, including “Beef Basics” to assist new landholders manage cattle and also FAMACHA a worm control session for Sheep and goat producers. Contact your DV to add your name down to the next round of courses.
Extra drought support from Hunter Local Land Services

Do you need help completing your application forms for NSW Government drought support? Or do you have problems accessing online forms? Hunter Local Land Services is ready to assist local farmers lodge forms with the NSW Rural Assistance Authority, with our drought support administration officer.

Anne Lantry is available by appointment, to assist local farmers complete their applications for support from the NSW Rural Assistance Authority. This includes measures announced by the NSW Government under the Emergency Drought Relief Package, including Drought Transport Subsidies for the transport of fodder, livestock and water. This subsidy covers up to 50% of the total freight cost for eligible primary producers, up to a maximum of $5 per kilometre (plus GST) to a maximum eligible distance of 1,500 kilometres. The maximum amount available to each producer under the program is $30,000.

Anne will be working between our Scone, Merriwa and Singleton offices. If you want to make an appointment with Anne, please contact her via 0428394668 or via email anne.lantry@lls.nsw.gov.au

It is important to remember to bring along supporting documents including:
- ABN or ACB
- address and contact details (including email)
- bank account details
- recent Council Rates notice
- recent LLS Rates notice
- type and number of stock being transported and cost of freight
- owner carrier details (registration papers, Vendor Declaration Book and/or log book if applicable) or carrier tax invoice
- fodder, water, and agistment notices or tax invoices
- Any other supporting documents you wish to include

You can apply online or access the forms at: https://www.raa.nsw.gov.au/assistance/emergency-drought-relief

For more information about available drought support and the NSW Government’s response to drought please visit: https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/climate-and-emergencies/droughthub
The Risks Of Swill Feeding

Swill is the traditional name given to food waste fed to pigs. Swill feeding is illegal as it has been the cause of Foot and Mouth Disease outbreaks overseas. Prohibiting swill feeding assists in keeping Australia free of many exotic diseases. The recent outbreak of African Swine Fever in China last month illustrates the risks involved and potential economic impact if a disease such as this was to be introduced in Australia.

These foods are NOT to be fed to any pigs, including pet pigs:

- Any food containing mammal products, such as: pies, sausage rolls, bacon and cheese rolls, pizza, salami, deli meats, table scraps etc
- Any carcase or part of a carcase of a mammal, including raw or cooked meat, bone, offal, blood or hide. Pigs that feed on carcasses are at risk of contracting anthrax and salmonella, which are contagious to humans.
- Household, commercial or industrial waste, including restaurant food and discarded cooking oils
- Anything that has been in contact with prohibited pig feed via collection, storage or transport in contaminated containers (such as meat trays and take-away food containers)

The following CAN be fed to pigs, as long as they have not been in contact with meat products or stored in contaminated containers:

- Milk, milk products and milk by-products
- Eggs
- Dry meal made from meat, blood or bone (processed by commercial hot rendering and purchased from a reputable produce store or feed merchant)
- Fruit, vegetables and cereals

African Swine Fever – China

African Swine Fever (ASF) is a highly infectious viral disease of pigs that is exotic to Australia. It is transmitted primarily by direct contact between pigs or ingestion of contaminated meat (swill feeding). Ticks can also spread the disease between pigs. No vaccine is available. There is a current outbreak of ASF in China, detected on 1st August 2018. This is the first report of ASF in Asia, outside of Russia. It has been suggested that swill feeding may have been the mechanism of introduction, as the sick and dead pigs were fed catering and kitchen waste. Infected pigs had clinical signs of fever, vomiting and constipation and died within 2-5 days of showing clinical signs.

This event is significant because China produces approximately 500 million pigs per year, which represents about half of the world’s pig production. This may have significant implications for Chinese pig production and international demand for pork meat.

PigPass

All pigs must be identified when they leave the property where they were born. This includes movements direct to an abattoir, through a saleyard, direct to another producer or privately. All pigs must be identified with your registered swine brand or NLIS ear tag. You then need to complete a PigPass National Vendor Declaration (NVD) which accompanies the pigs. This assists with tracking the movements in the event of an exotic disease outbreak or a food safety scare.

To register, visit www.pigpass.com.au or phone the PigPass Help Desk on 1800 001 458

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**I PIG**  **20 PIGS**  **PET PIG**  **XMAS PIG**

IT DOESN’T MATTER – THE PIGPASS SYSTEM STILL APPLIES TO YOU IF YOU OWN PIGS

GETTING STARTED WITH PIGPASS

TO REGISTER FOR THE PIGPASS SYSTEM YOU WILL NEED

1. PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION CODE
2. TATTOO NUMBER
3. ABN (IF APPLICABLE)
4. VISIT PIGPASS.COM.AU
Q fever Vaccination Opportunity

Q fever is one of the most prevalent zoonotic diseases (diseases spread from animals to people) in Australia with around 500 human cases per year. It is caused by the bacterium Coxiella burnetii.

Some people show no symptoms but other with Q-fever may develop flu like symptoms, headaches, muscle aches, fever, sweating, endocarditis and 15-20% of sufferers’ progress to a chronic illness with chronic fatigue that can be debilitating for years, muscle pain, depression, hepatitis, pneumonia and heart failure which can be fatal.

The highest number of human cases occur in North Western NSW and South Western QLD most likely due to wildlife (kangaroos), feral goats and pigs, but can spread from any animal including cattle, sheep, goats, wildlife and even dogs and cats. The bacteria can survive in the environment for years and with the dusty drought conditions the organism could be stirred up and spread kilometres in the wind.

People are even catching Q fever from mowing their lawns where wallabies have fed and left their droppings behind. Once the mowing happens the bacteria becomes aerosolised and the person doing the mowing breath in the organism.

Infected animals often have no symptoms but can cause abortions. Coxiella burnetii are found in the birth fluids and placenta in very high numbers, urine, faeces, blood or milk of animals that carry the bacteria. There are approximately 1,000,000 organisms/gram of placenta. Humans only need 1-2 organisms for infection to occur. Over the last month I have heard of 2 cases of Q fever in goat producers in the Hunter region causing severe illness.

Human infection usually occurs by inhaling the organism, but infection also occurs with direct contact with infected animals or drinking unpasteurised milk.

Farming is one of the occupations with a high risk of contracting Q fever. A Victorian goat dairy farm had at least 24 people contract this serious disease, making it the most significant farm-based Q-fever outbreak ever documented in Australia. The people infected included office staff and even a wife of one of the workers who had done her husband’s washing, illustrating that family members coming in contact with your contaminated clothing can lead to infection.

We are the only country in the world with a vaccination available to prevent Q fever in humans. The vaccination is safe and effective and the best way to prevent Q fever infection in high-risk occupations. To be vaccinated is a two-step process. The first appointment requires a blood and skin test to be done to see if you have already been exposed to the disease. If you have, then you don’t need to be vaccinated. The second appointment (1 week later) is when the vaccination is given. The pre-screening tests will demonstrate if you should be vaccinated or not. The vaccination cannot be given to children <15yrs of age, pregnant women and those that are immune suppressed.

The Hunter LLS have been in discussion with ‘Chromis Occupational Medicine’ at Maitland to attempt to get a decreased vaccination rate for producers. If we are able to get 10 producers at once then for the two appointments (includes testing and the vaccination) we can get the price down to $325 where normally it would cost $436. If it is only the pre-screening tests required then the cost is $125 (normally $150). For producers attending our regional beef forum “Growing Hunter Beef” at Singleton on Thursday November 8, Fairholme Medical Practice will have a stall, discussing Q-fever with farmers.

Please contact Kylie Greentree via email kylie.greentree@lls.nsw.gov.au or phone 02 49301030 to register your interest and once we have 10 people on the list we will organise an appointment.
Veterinary assistance during drought

HLLS District Vets have been busy responding to an increase in animal health issues during the drought to assist producers to manage stock on available feed supplies but also to ensure an Exotic or Emergency Animal Disease isn’t masquerading as a common culprit. A large number of drought affected western cattle on agistment have also had to adapt to coastal conditions.

Cattle deaths on several dairy farms were recently investigated in the (dairy strong) Mid Coast area. On two properties the cows died from fatal nose bleeds, however post mortems conducted on farm, by the District Veterinarian found different causes. A third property, reported a manic cow with neurological signs. A post mortem was conducted to rule out Mad Cow disease and she was diagnosed with encephalitis from a bacterial infection. Ruling out Mad Cow disease, in such cases, is important as it demonstrates overseas markets can have confidence in our status as a Mad Cow Disease free country.

Fatal nose bleeds in cattle occur occasionally when bacteria are able to establish an infection in the lung. If this infection erodes through a blood vessel, a fatal bleed can occur.

Sometimes this is due to Vena Caval syndrome whereby a past ruminal acidosis from grain feeding or inadequate fibre reduces rumen pH. This damages the rumen wall enabling bacteria to enter the blood stream and establish infections and abscesses in the liver which can then seed bacteria to the lungs. Alternatively, a chronic bacterial pneumonia can turn nasty and cause a fatal nose bleed. Commonly a respiratory virus (or other stressor) initiates infection and facilitates secondary bacterial lung invasion.

In many cases we are seeing increased animal health issues linked to drought conditions and drought rations, lack of energy or fibre in feeds, High nitrate levels and other issues in feed, feeding of unusual feeds or paddocks not normally grazed and other stresses from co-mingling and confinement feeding.

Seeking veterinary advice and early treatment for unwell animals gives the best chance of recovery. This investigation should also focus on looking for underlying stressors or disease that can pre-dispose cattle to lung infections.

Moving stock to areas with different pastures, parasites and diseases is also a frequent issue as the stock may not have immunity to local disease or a conditioned taste aversion to local toxic plants. If you notice any unusual illnesses or unexplained stock deaths please call your private vet or District vet. Timely investigation can prevent further issues.

UPCOMING EVENTS
Growing Hunter Beef — Singleton Thursday, November 8
Beef Basics — Tocal Wednesday, November 28
PIG Product Workshop — Wingham December 2018

Here’s how to contact your district vet:

Jim Kerr – Tocal
0439 185 275

Kylie Greentree – Maitland
0428498 687

Kristi Arnot – Singleton
0409 758 823

Lyndell Stone – Wingham
0429 532 855

Jane Bennett – Scone
0427 322 311

For more information about Hunter Local Land Services:
1300 795 299
admin.hunter@lls.nsw.gov.au
www.lls.nsw.gov.au
Hunter Local Land Services
816 Tocal Road (private Bag 2010)
Paterson, NSW 2421
Australia