Respiratory disease in lambs

SIR, – I write with regard to the paper by Goodwin-Ray and others (2008). This field trial, conducted in the dry summer of 2002/03, was presented at the New Zealand Sheep and Beef Cattle Veterinarians Conference in 2004 and was subsequently published in the proceedings (Goodwin and others 2004). The authors concluded there was no statistically significant effect of vaccination against pneumonic pasteurellosis on the extent of lung lesions at slaughter or on average daily weight gains (ADG).

Acute fibrinous pneumonia is commonly seen in hoggets and chronic non-progressive pneumonia (CNP) in lambs and hoggets at three to 10 months of age; both manifestations are termed enzootic pneumonia.

Pneumonia in young sheep is a disease of complex aetiology, and Mannheimia (Pasteurella) haemolytica is considered to be the main bacterium involved. However, parainfluenza type 3, Mycoplasma species and other bacteria and viruses have also been implicated (West and others 2002).

In New Zealand, lambs not sent for sale at weaning are mustered and yarded for shearing, dipping, vaccination, etc, on repeated occasions. These activities are associated with the development of CNP. Ovipast Plus (Intervet) vaccine is sold in New Zealand to protect lambs that will not be sent for sale, and are therefore exposed to conditions that predispose them to disease.

Ovipast Plus vaccine is registered to reduce mortality associated with M haemolytica and Pasteurella trehalosi infections when administered to lambs before the risk period. In the trial reported, the following should be noted:

- The lambs were vaccinated one to six weeks postweaning and four to six weeks later. Protection would be expected two to three weeks after the booster. By this time CNP is likely to be present, as the trial was on high-risk farms. Moreover, the vaccine is licensed to reduce mortality; no statements are made regarding reduction in lung lesions. Unfortunately, death rates were not reported.
- There was no investigation of other respiratory pathogens.
- It is mentioned that there was no difference between the rates of isolation of M haemolytica and P trehalosi from both groups. The vaccine manufacturer has never claimed that, and the results from the trial did not find any correlation between the isolation of the bacteria and the histopathological classification of the pneumonia.

Ovipast Plus does not claim reduction in lung lesions or increases in ADG. Lung lesions can be due to different respiratory pathogens and ADG is influenced by many different factors, not only by infection with M haemolytica and/or P trehalosi.

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References


GOODWIN-RAY, K. A., STEVENSON, M. A. & HEUER, C. (2008) Effect of vaccinating lambs against pneumonic pasteurellosis under New Zealand field conditions on their weight gain and pneumonic lung lesions at slaughter. Veterinary Record 162, 9-11

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