

## Canterbury Organic Animal health seminar August 2007

### Summary:

- Plenty of good quality feed is the best way to keep animals healthy and prevent illness.
- Both sheep and cattle can suffer from internal (worms) and external (lice) parasites.
- Mixed species pastures, with legumes, chicory and other herbs, provides a range of minerals which helps maintain stock health and prevent parasite problems.
- “Clean” feed is especially valuable – minimises exposure to worm eggs.
- Some sheep breeds are more resistant to parasites than others.
- Select individuals that show resistance, and cull those that are most susceptible.
- Make sure fences are in good order.
- Sick animals must be treated, even if it means they will temporarily lose certification.
- Certified stock that need treatment with conventional medicines should be put into a quarantine paddock for 48 hours and will lose their certification for one year.

### 1. Keeping them healthy

The main method of keeping farm animals in good health is to **feed them well** in both winter and summer. A mixed species pasture (one that has several different species of grasses, legumes (e.g., clovers, and herbs such as chicory and plantain) provides a wider range of minerals than straight ryegrass. Sheep need high quality feed at mating (tupping) so they will be more likely to conceive twins, and also during pregnancy. After weaning, lambs need to be put onto high quality feed to fatten. **Do not overstock.** Excess feed in summer can be made into hay for the winter.

In winter, supplementary feed will usually be necessary – e.g., hay, pea straw, baleage, grain. If stock are certified, remember you will need certified feed.

Use soil tests to check levels and ratios of minerals and pH. Apply fertiliser and lime regularly to keep pasture in top condition, which in turn will keep stock healthy.

**2. Clean feed** It is a good practice to move stock onto clean feed as frequently as possible – e.g., move an electric fence forward each day to give them a fresh piece of pasture, or keep paddocks small and move mobs regularly. This means they are less exposed to worm eggs.

Willow and poplar are high in tannins which can help prevent worm impact. Flax leaves are also good, as are tree lucerne leaves and pine tree needles. (But do not feed pregnant stock on pine or macrocarpa needles as this can induce abortions.)

Mixing stock – sheep and cattle grazed together are a good idea, also chooks. Having a mixed farm system, such as sheep and chooks in an orchard, also works well and is probably more sustainable than a having single farm type. Sheep and chooks can eat the fallen and reject apples and provide manure to the trees, and chooks will eat some codlin moth larvae.

**3. What sort of stock?** After considering your farm size, soil type, end products, distance to markets etc, decide on what sort of stock you want to grow.

**4. Sheep (for lamb meat):** Some breeds are less susceptible than others to internal parasites. Perendales, Texcel and Wiltshires have some resistance to worms. Romneys are also a very hardy breed. Within a mob, some individuals are more resistant than others: the ones which have “daggy” bottoms can be culled; the better ones will hopefully pass on their worm-resistant genes to their offspring and a flock can be built up that is resistant to parasites. **The main way to prevent parasites becoming a problem is to feed all stock well.**

Tonics such as cider vinegar are useful against worms. You can easily make your own by covering apples with water in a bucket and allowing to brew until it begins to smelly vinegary (about a month). Give animals a drench (10 mls) of this if they look like they are suffering from worms or are sickly. Adding the cider vinegar to water troughs is also a good idea. A garlic or onion drench is also beneficial (soak onions or garlic overnight).

Herbs can be added, such as nasturtium. Place in a bag and steep in the cider vinegar.

Lice: Sheep rubbing on fences or trees is usually a sign of lice. A good preventative measure is to shear twice a year. Various remedies can be used such as a dusting of sulphur. A good product is Extinosaid which is based on a bacteria which eats the lice, however this is not a Biogro approved product and permission for its use can be sought from the head office. Dorper sheep lose their fleece each year and so are less susceptible to lice, and also do not need shearing or crutching.

Fly strike: Sheep must be crutched regularly to get rid of dags that encourage flies.

Pink eye: Homeopathic remedies are permitted and a homeopathic remedy for pink eye in sheep has been successful.

**5. Cattle** Angus are a hardy breed and individuals within a mob can also be selected for parasite resistance and general health. Cattle generally are less work than sheep – they do not need to be crutched or shorn.

**6. Fencing** Good fences are essential – especially for sheep, or if you or your neighbour has a bull. It is essential to be able to save feed for later without the animals “breaking” into the paddock. Electric fencing is a good way to fence off small areas or to give a small strip of new feed (break feeding).

**7. Shelter and water** Stock need shelter from the sun and wind if possible, especially when lambing or calving. Make sure they have plenty of fresh water available at all times.

**8. Stress** Do not stress stock – move quietly and slowly. Do not allow dogs to chase them or bark too much. Check animals regularly so that you will see if there are any problems and this also allows them to get used to humans being around them.

**9. Sick animals and certification** If animals are sick they must be treated. For instance, if ewes need to be drenched, or a animal needs antibiotics after a difficult labour, they must be treated and put in a quarantine paddock for 48 hours. Their numbers should be recorded. If certified, they and their progeny will lose their certification for one year.

**10. Buying stock – certified or conventional?** Certified stock are likely to be more hardy than conventional but will be more expensive. If starting out, you can buy conventional stock and if they are grazing on a certified farm their progeny and wool will become certified after one year, but they will not be able to be certified.

If you buy in day old chicks or bobby calves under 7 days old (provided these are raised on the certified pasture or fed certified organic food) they will be fully certified. However the calves will not be certified for meat if they are raised on conventional milk powder.

**11. Books** *The Farmers' Veterinary Guide* and *Practical Smallfarming in New Zealand* are useful.