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A mulesing miracle?

WORLD-FIRST on-farm trials of an injectable pre-operative pain relief treatment for sheep began near Goulburn in New South Wales last week.

The compound Xylazine will be trialled by the University of Sydney Veterinary School in partnership with the creator of the Tri-Solfen mulesing pain-relief spray, Animal Ethics and research partner Bayer, as a pre-operative analgesic treatment before lamb marking, mulesing, castration and tail docking.



Animal Ethics director, Dr Meredith Sheil, said she has been trying to develop effective, affordable and practical analgesia treatments for farm animals comparable to those available for humans.

Large commercial field trials over the next 12 months aimed to finetune Xylazine dosage rates, following mainly laboratory research over the past six months. Xylazine is already registered for use in sheep as a sedative.

"What we've been doing is looking at whether we can develop a way of administering this medication in small doses on farm safely and effectively to provide pre-operative analgesia for the procedures," Dr Sheil said.

Dr Sheil said the treatment being trialled was expected to cost less than 30 cents a lamb, and on-farm use would involve an intramuscular injection in lambs about 20 minutes before any surgical procedure takes place. Tri-Solfen will be applied to control groups and to lambs that receive the Xylazine injection during the trials.

Former Australian Wool Innovation director, Chick Olsson, said the unique research was aimed at allowing sheep producers to perform a complete set of treatments in one operation while reducing pain.

"The on-farm trials are also to ensure that lambs continue to mother up after surgery," he said.

Mr Olsson said it would be difficult for animal rights groups to argue with farmers' on-farm surgery practices when the Xylazine technology became available.

The on-farm trials are being funded by a linkage grant from the Australian Research Council. Mr Olsson's family has shares in Animal Ethics.

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