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Angst continues over OJD changes

AUSTRALIAN Wool Innovation (AWI) has stepped into the industry uproar over changes to Ovine Johnes Disease (OJD) management, due to start on January 1.

The organisation will host an open forum – likely to be on November 15 in Sydney – to facilitate provision of information about the OJD management changes to growers, debate on the issue and receive feedback on research needs on the disease.

AWI chairman Wal Merriman said he had received plenty of calls over the changes to the plan and while the organisation could not act agropolitically, it was within its charter to facilitate flow of information to growers.

Mr Merriman declined to give his personal view on the changes but said the event would present all sides of the debate as well as surveillance data.

Last week, the Sheepmeat Council of Australia (SCA) met with Animal Health Australia and discussed how to ramp up communications on the changes.

SCA president Ian McColl said more information would be delivered to growers over the next couple of months.

He said communication of information to growers had not been as good as he would have liked. But the task was made more difficult by the complexity of the disease and the way it affected every farmer differently, depending on their location and where they were trying to trade.

He said while it was AWI's prerogative to host a meeting on the issue, the council was working with its stakeholders to get as much information out as possible.

The council's representative on the National OJD Management Committee was NSW Farmers Sheepmeat committee chairman James Jackson, Guyra.

Mr Jackson said while he understood the angst, the new management program was risk-based, simple and fixed up holes in the current strategy.

It provided pathways for producers to trade – through abattoir surveillance and pooled faecal culture testing – and a pathway for studs to continue to sell stock, via the market assurance program.

But he said it was a problem that there was no surveillance at Fletchers abattoirs in Western Australia and New South Wales.

"It's my highest priority to get Fletchers going on this. NSW Farmers has policy now to mandate disease inspections in domestic abattoirs," he said.

Mr Jackson said abattoir surveillance cost about \$1 million a year and the market-assurance program was also subsidised for growers.

"We are not in the business of giving people grief for the sake of it," he said.

"The lines on the map are drawn by producers, not by bureaucrats. If you are going to have a program this is as easy as it gets."

Fletchers International's Roger Fletcher is sceptical about the value of OJD surveillance in abattoirs for the amount of money that is being spent on it.

He would like to see what surveillance has achieved and whether it has worked.

"By us doing the tests here, the ones who have a problem will find a way around it," he said. "And if they come through my plant and they have OJD, I get abused."



AWGA - News Update

He said he was not against the OJD changes but believed it was very confusing.

“I’ll do anything for the betterment of the industry but I’m not sure we are getting anywhere.”

The WA Farmers Federation has urged other states to get on and implement the changes.

Wool section president Ed Rogister said he wanted the new management program to proceed on time and for the new Sheep Health Statement to be mandatory, which it was not in WA at present.

“Get on with it. Learn to live with it. If we keep procrastinating about it the disease will get out of hand,” he said.

“The old system wasn’t working so if something’s not working you have to turn around and fix it and fix it quickly because it will cost industry a lot of money.”

Figures he had heard was that in five years’ time, if nothing was done, OJD would cost WA \$52 million a year through lost production in wool, meat and dead animals.

Mr Rogister said more research on the disease was needed, particularly its prevalence in below 400 millimetre rainfall areas.

WoolProducers Australia president Geoff Power said the problem was every state had a different view and it was up to legislators in each state to make the changes.

This meant Victoria was unlikely to have a mandated sheep health statement, while South Australia’s would be a legal requirement.

He said AWI was a research and development organisation and so its input on that front would be appropriate.

“I think there would be a lot of support to research a better and safer vaccine. The vaccine is about 30 years old so from that perspective (on AWI’s involvement) I agree but not as far as the debate is concerned,” he said.

The Victorian Farmers Federation will host meetings in Edenhope, Ararat and Hamilton this month to further explain what is required.

Livestock group president Ian Feldtmann said growers would no longer be able to rely on vaccination of sheep to gain access to South Australian markets.

He said there should have been greater recognition for vaccination under the new rules, particularly for producers to access protected areas and trading of second generation vaccinated sheep.

“The VFF would have liked to have seen the date pushed back at least six months for better communication but the national management committee decided that the start-up date needed to stand,” he said.

“We do not want Victorian farmers losing more money on what many are already calling impractical rules, which have the potential to hurt producers by limiting access to traditional interstate markets.”

Australian Wool Growers Association director Chick Olsson said the management changes would have devastating impacts on growers’ livelihoods.

“The wool industry has been down this sad and destructive road before, with a high human and economic cost,” he said.

“We must try and let our governments know that they have been poorly advised and that no formal wool industry consultation has even occurred, so hopefully common sense and reason will prevail.”

•Details: Meetings in Victoria will be held on Friday, November 9, from 9-11am at the Edenhope Football Club; and on Wednesday, November 14, from 8.30am-10am at the Chalambar Golf Club, Ararat, and from 12.30pm at the Hamilton Saleyards

<http://theland.farmonline.com.au/news/nationalrural/livestock/sheep/angst-continues-over-ojd-changes/2631593.aspx?storypage=0>