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More bare-breech sheep bred: survey

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MORE than half the sheep producers still mules their sheep for flystrike prevention but a growing percentage are breeding plainer-bodied, barer-breech sheep. One in five properties have had lice in sheep in 2012 and 5 per cent of flocks have been severely affected by footrot.

These are a few of the key findings of a survey on Sheep Disease Management Practises of South Australian flocks by the University of Adelaide's School of Animal and Veterinary Sciences.

The survey was undertaken in August and September by fourth-year veterinary science students Lucy Innes, Ariel Stephenson and Emily Warner with Production Animal Health lecturer Dr Colin Trengove. It focussed on flystrike, lice and lameness – all significant in production losses and costs to control.

It covered a cross-section of Merino and cross-bred flocks in the Mid North, South East and Kangaroo Island, with 330 respondents from 1000 surveys sent out.

The responses showed many producers were following best-practice recommendations but could improve in some areas particularly in the quarantine period after the introduction of sheep to their properties, and regular inspection of their flock for animal health issues.

Just 46 per cent inspected their flocks for lice twice a year by parting the wool of a cross-section of their flocks, and just 10pc of producers inspected a proportion of their sheep more than three months off-shears in the most easily detectable areas: the neck, lower flanks and upper legs.

Another major concern was that 26pc of producers admitted not setting up sheep-proof fences – the best way to prevent lice and footrot from spreading to neighbouring properties.

For flystrike prevention, it appears 40pc of producers are breeding plainer-bodied, barer-breech sheep but 56.7pc are still mulesing as there is no viable alternative.

Close to half of those still mulesing are using the pain relief drug Tri- Solfen which first became available in 2005 and respondents expected this to rise to 67pc in 2013.

Analysing results on lice, 54pc routinely treated for lice even if there were no signs, such as rubbing.

It has been recommended that only lice-infected sheep are treated, to delay chemical resistance.



IMPORTANT RESEARCH: Fourth-year University of Adelaide veterinary science students Ariel Stephenson, Lucy Innes and Emily Warner with their Production Animal Health lecturer Colin Trengove have undertaken a survey on sheep disease management practises in South Australian flocks.