



Pregnancy Toxemia and Hypocalcaemia: FAST FACTS

As autumn lambing approaches there are two health conditions sheep producers must be aware of. These conditions, namely pregnancy toxemia and hypocalcaemia (milk fever), affect ewes in late pregnancy and early lactation. They can exhibit similar symptoms such as lethargy, straying from the herd, recumbency, tremors and death. If identified and treated promptly and with the correct protocol, affected ewes may recover. While treatment is possible, knowing how to prevent these conditions will yield far better outcomes for both producers and sheep. Keep these facts handy to help you navigate problems in your late gestation ewes.

Pregnancy Toxemia

- Caused by dangerously low glucose levels due to inadequate nutrition
- Late stage gestation and twinning ewes are most susceptible
- Identifying and drafting off twinning ewes to ensure they receive adequate feed is an ideal management strategy
- Can be brought on by lack of feed, new green feed that is high in water and low in dry matter, extreme heat or weather causing periods of inappetence
- Ewes with suspected toxemia can be diagnosed by your vet based on clinical history, nutrition status, and a urine test to check for ketones
- Treatment generally includes drenching with 160mL of Vytrate liquid concentrate – a high glucose and electrolyte supplement.
- Additional administration of 70-100mL of “4 in 1” under the skin can also aid in recovery
- In some cases inducing lambing or a caesarian section may be indicated to ensure ewe survival
- Producers should monitor feed on offer during late gestation periods and supplement with high quality hay or hard feed if necessary

HypoCalcaemia (Milk Fever)

- Caused by a calcium deficiency in the bloodstream which leads to improper muscle contraction
- The most susceptible animals are those in the last six weeks of gestation or the first month of lactation
- Stress from trucking, yarding or shearing as well as inappetence during inclement weather can also contribute to the onset of hypocalcaemia
- A vet or experienced stock person can administer calcium supplement directly into the bloodstream. Recovery is almost instant. Treatment can be repeated if necessary and additional administration of calcium under the skin may be indicated
- Good management and adequate nutrition is the key to prevention. Limestone additives or calcium licks may provide additional calcium if hypocalcaemia is a problem for your herd.

Our Veterinary Team at Swans Veterinary Services is happy to discuss management and treatment strategies with our producers. Sheep that are showing neurologic signs may qualify for subsidized post mortem testing under the National Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies Surveillance Program. And remember, now is the time to put prevention and good management strategies in place.

Sincerely,

Dr. Katie Kreutz BSc BVMS