

It's a cruel blow...

With thousands of recently acquired prize rams being readied for the peak joining season, it's a cruel blow to find out they could bring home a lot more than their genes.

While many farms haven't had the misfortune of bringing in a debilitating disease or costly pest, this could simply mean that luck is running out!

Unfortunately, it's a case of caveat emptor (let the buyer beware) where pests and disease are concerned; while the overwhelming majority of seedstock producers and commercial flock sheep vendors have strict biosecurity measures in place, the diseases are insidious.

WoolProducers Chief Executive, Greg Weller, urges producers to be aware of a number of diseases. "The key ones are sheep lice, ovine Johne's disease (OJD), footrot and ovine brucellosis.

"Once they sneak under our guard, they can cause huge problems; they're hard to monitor, costly to control, and sadly, can spread through the district."

However, there's a long list of other diseases, pests and risks, including:

- Drench resistant worms, fluke and tapeworms
- Noxious weeds
- Clostridial diseases and cheesy gland
- Hydatids
- Chemical residues
- Vibriosis
- Mycotic dermatitis ('lumpy wool' or 'dermo')
- Itchmite
- Pinkeye

Mr Weller says despite all the work undertaken over the years there's still a large reservoir of pests and diseases. "It only takes a few cases at the local saleyards or a few individuals in the district to ensure these problems continue to be issues for all of us.



"The only really effective approach is farm biosecurity - being aware of the risk factors for pests and diseases, and how to put simple measures in place to ensure they don't appear.

"This means firstly asking questions of the vendor about the animal's history and management, and using a Sheep Health Statement."

Vendors offering restocker sheep for sale should complete and sign a Sheep Health Statement for each consignment, and this Statement must be made available for prospective purchasers to inspect. (See a Sheep Health Statement at: <http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au/toolkit.cfm>)



The Sheep Health Statement includes disease information relating to the sheep and on any treatments they may have received. Greg Weller says “Obviously, the mob’s life story can’t be on the Sheep Health Statement, but at least it can give some background information on them and what, if any, risks there may be in buying them.”

Key pests and diseases:

- **Sheep lice** – thoroughly inspect new sheep for lice before mixing them with your flock, if lice are detected, isolate the sheep and treat accordingly; excluding stray, neighbouring and drovers sheep from entering the property is a key preventative measure
- **Ovine Johne’s disease (OJD)** - be aware of introducing OJD, particularly if buying unvaccinated sheep from higher prevalence areas, though even sheep from low prevalence areas can be a risk. Question the vendor, check the sheep Health Statement and use the risk scoring system; monitor all sheep for signs of ill-thrift
- **Footrot** – remember that infected sheep are not always lame, the infection can persist for many years, and dry conditions and recent treatments (paring, bathing and both) can mask the disease. Ask vendors about sheep origin (introduced or home-bred), footrot history and the local situation. There are restrictions on moving sheep across footrot zones and state borders
- **Ovine brucellosis** – this disease can cause rams to be infertile and ewes to abort. Cull rams sold at store sales, in saleyards or from non-accredited flocks and pregnant ewes that have come from an infected property can carry the disease. Buy rams only from flocks that are listed as accredited free of ovine brucellosis
- **Worms** - drench resistance is widespread and there is a risk of introducing resistant strains when sheep are brought in; it is advisable to treat them with a quarantine drench. Tests are available to determine the drench resistance status of a flock or mob
- **Liver fluke** - sheep from flukey properties or regions can spread the parasite. A test can be used to monitor for fluke. Stock from flukey areas that have not been treated recently can be given a quarantine drench with an efficient flukicide to kill immature fluke
- **Clostridial diseases** - sheep should be vaccinated against clostridial disease, and cheesy gland. Check the vendor’s Health Statement; if the full vaccination history is unknown, assume that the sheep are not vaccinated
- **Noxious weeds** - if there are high levels of contaminating seed in the wool, restrict the sheep to certain areas and consider specific weed control in the future, or even early shearing
- **Hydatids** - introduced sheep can infect a property with hydatids via farm dogs; hence do not feed offal to dogs or get to dead sheep. Consider regular treatment for all dogs

If you see anything unusual on your property call the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888 or the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

For more information, visit www.woolproducers.com.au or www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au.

For information about diseases visit <http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au/diseases.cfm>