



SHEEP INDUSTRY HEALTH CHALLENGES

Preface

Every animal agriculture industry has health challenges that are actually opportunities for increase animal production/performance. If these opportunities can be captured the end result will be a more competitive supermarket product, greater market access and more potential profit. The sheep industry is somewhat unlike other segment of animal agriculture in that we produce a specialty product. It is not readily available nor is it cheap. We are already in a type of niche market and that market is not as price sensitive as beef, pork or chicken. Does that mean that improving performance or production is not important? Absolutely not! The gains in efficiency will be made and the people who are the most efficient will remain in business. The question is which producers, regions or countries will have the economic advantage and resources to excel in the next decades.

Health Problems that challenge production/performance/efficiency

1. Scrapie – National Challenge

Export Potential

Human Health

Plan to overcome – National eradication. Relatively unsuccessful in the past. USDA appears to be making a commitment this time around. Live animal test is critical for eradication program.

The economic significance of this disease is not measured in morbidity or mortality. Rather the significance is measured in media articles and image.

2. Footrot – Flock Challenge

Preventable, difficult to control, very difficult to eradicate

Significant Impact on individual flock, morbidity and culling, and risk of transmission impedes animal sale or transfer.

3. Abortion Disease (Chlamydia, Campylobacter, Toxoplasmosis) – Flock Challenge

Controllable

Significant Impact (performance, profitability) on a flock to flock basis.

4. Parasitism

Controllable, Manageable

Minor Impact on individual flock

5. Animal Health Products – The size of the sheep industry makes it cost-prohibitive for animal health companies to invest in research and development for new animal health products. The reclassification of sheep as a minor species has potential but in reality we have seen little interest from animal health companies.

The goal in nutrition, health, management to produce the most volume of high quality lamb at the least possible cost. The challenge is to achieve these goals quicker than any other area of the world.