

## **On – Farm Biosecurity: Sheep Shearer**

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Biosecurity is defined as preventative management practices that protect the health and wellbeing of both animals and humans from the entry or spread of disease agents. The concept of 'biosecurity' is not new, however it is likely that renewed awareness has been accelerated by international events such as the outbreak of foot and mouth Disease (FMD) in the United Kingdom and Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE, mad cow disease) in Europe and US. For on-farm biosecurity to be successful everyone involved with animal production and product harvest, including the shearers and the shearing crew, must pay attention to their role in minimizing the risk of spreading diseases between animals and to other farms they visit. This is why biosecurity is so important. Biosecurity efforts are designed to prevent the introduction and spread of disease. These efforts can be further categorized into external measures (external biosecurity), those directed at prevention of entry of new diseases into a group and internal measures (internal biosecurity), those directed at prevention of spread of disease within a group.

Sheep diseases can be brought onto the farm by people and equipment moving from one location to another during the shearing season. Therefore appropriate cleaning and disinfection is critical to breaking transmission cycles of disease agents that contaminate housing, feeding, and equipment. Personal hygiene of animal handlers is also crucial to stopping the transmission of pathogens from animal to animal, or even from animal to humans. Personal hygiene should include frequent hand washing, cleaning and disinfection of boots, and thorough washing of clothing to accomplish the full removal of all organic debris (faeces, urine, milk, sputum, etc.).

Shearing time sees an increase in the risk of the spread of pests and diseases due to yarding and shedding of large numbers of sheep. In addition, the movement of shearers from property to property increases the risk of transferring pests, weeds and diseases they may have settled on clothes, shearing equipment or vehicles. Thus it is important shearers and sheep producers recognize disease risk and take measurements to minimize the risk of disease spread between flocks and animals within a flock.

The Falkland Islands are fortunate to be free of many farm animal diseases that cause significant losses in other countries, such as foot-and-mouth disease (FMD). An outbreak of a disease such as FMD in the Falkland's would have a massive detrimental impact on the wool industry. In the event of an outbreak, there would be an immediate halt to exports of animal-related products including wool, which could last 6 to 12 months at a minimum.

Currently on the Falklands 2 common sheep diseases we have are Caseous lymphadenitis also known as boils and Orf. - Boils is a contagious bacterial disease of the lymphatic system of sheep, the clinical sign of boils is abscesses involving the lymph nodes on the side of the head or beneath the jaw (and many other glands). These abscesses are often ruptured or cut during shearing and can be spread on equipment, clothing or even the shearer's hands to other sheep they have contact with. The bacteria can live for long periods of time on infected equipment, premises and soil. For this reason, the healthy, young animals should be shorn first, followed by animals of questionable health. If an abscess is ruptured during shearing, the shearer should disinfect shearing equipment exposed to the abscess fluids immediately. Orf, on the other hand, is a viral disease which causes red nodules,

blisters and/or scabs to form primarily on the lips and around the mouth of sheep. This virus can also be seen around the udder regions of nursing ewes. Orf is caused by a “pox” virus that can also affect humans, so caution should be used when handling sheep with orf.

As shearers have a key role in harvesting wool on sheep farms, it is essential that shearers and shearing crews incorporate biosecurity management techniques to protect other flocks and themselves from the spread of a disease. Techniques such as:

- properly maintaining and cleaning all equipment and clothing when working between different farms and between different flocks on the same farm
- if you shear a potentially infected sheep, be sure to clean your equipment prior to shearing other sheep in the flock to minimize spread between animals within the flock
- reduce exposure to infected animals within a flock. Shear healthy young sheep first, followed by older sheep. Shear potentially unhealthy or sick sheep last. If sheep have lumps or potential CL, handle them last and try not to cut or rupture the abscess.
- be sure to clean organic material, mud and manure off your shoes before you disinfect. Manure and mud on your shoes can also transfer disease between flocks.
- dispose of any excess wool product or waste that you may have picked up before starting
- farmers should ensure facilities and disinfectants are available on their farm for biosecurity measures.

No one biosecurity plan is going to work for every shearer or shearing scenario. Therefore use a common-sense approach to prevent the accidental introduction of infectious agents to sheep within a flock and most importantly to other flocks you shear.

