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BREEDERS
SOCIETY

OPP CONCERNED SHEEP BREEDERS SOCIETY

Newsletter — August 1997

Mary Jarvis on LA200?

Not really — not yet. But Mare did tell one of her doctors that if one of her sheep had a temp of 104 that ewe would be getting massive doses of LA200. Mare's fever is down from that point by now!

Backing up a little — to shortly after our annual meeting in early April. Mary, our secretary/treasurer and the glue that holds us together, began feeling a little "off." Thinking it was just a bug she'd easily shake — and with lambs, crias, and kids due — Mare didn't slow down. But she got worse instead of better. Sick enough that she and Rusty decided not to milk this year (they milked 90 ewes in '96). She did keep working full time at the credit union in Duluth until just a few weeks ago when it finally became impossible.

Though Mare has been in considerable pain, the worst part is not knowing what she's at war with. Tests have ruled out Lymes, thyroid problems, anything infectious — but joint pain has been so severe that she's often on crutches (when she feels well enough to even get out of bed). The latest medical opinion is that it is likely one of about 100 diseases in the rheumatoid arthritis family. By the time you read this we hope she'll be on the upswing and back to work again — and, as she says, "Making Rusty's Life Miserable."

We know that Mare's positive attitude and terrific sense of humor will carry her through this. She can still laugh, continues to crack jokes, and would love to hear from you (cards, letters, e-mail O.K. but please no phone calls — in self-preservation, the phone is sometimes off the hook). While she's out of commission, OPP Society board members will be pinch hitting so please be patient. Official business should continue to be mailed to Mary Jarvis. But until she's back on track, Mary asks that other inquiries be directed to Judy Lewman at 612-472-4524 (e-mail: JL6250@aol.com).

New Faces on OPPCSB Board

The terms of Mary Jarvis (secretary/treasurer) as well as Judy Lewman and Greg Pauley (directors) expired this year. Greg did not wish to run for re-election as he has sold his sheep and gone back to school. In addition, president Jim Schultz announced at our annual meeting that he was stepping down. Judy Lewman was nominated to fill the one year remaining of Jim's term. Members Stefania Dignum, Gretta MacIntyre, and Holly Neaton had submitted resumes and agreed to run for the two three-year board positions.

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Shortly after our annual meeting Gretta MacIntyre was elected to the board of her breed association. She has chosen to withdraw from the OPP Society race in order to concentrate her efforts on that position. There being no further nominations, Stefania Dignum and Holly Neaton are your new directors. Mary Jarvis will continue as secretary/treasurer and Judy Lewman will fill the remaining year of the president's term.

The directors' race turned out to be a real win/win situation. We end up with two excellent additions to the OPP Society board and also have a progressive, health conscious member of our group serving in a breed society leadership position. Here is a brief introduction to your new directors and, since we already had her bio on file, a few words about Gretta MacIntyre:

STEFANIA DIGNUM

RR 1, Parham, Ontario, Canada K0H 2K0
613-375-6308

Stefania and her husband Ray, along with their daughter Louise, are widely known as the sole importers of Icelandic sheep to North America to date. At present, the flock consists of 100 purebred breeding ewes plus a few replacement ewe lambs and, to ensure enough bloodlines for the breed, almost 20 rams. A large number of their animals are sold for breeding.

Beginning with various breeds in 1979 (including Scottish Blackface, Suffolks, Hampshires, Dorsets and Columbias), the Dignums were never happy with the flock's performance. So in 1985 they decided to import their first Icelandics from Stefania's homeland. Not until 1988, after agreeing to volunteer their flock for a Canadian government Maedi/Visna (OPP) study, did Stefania learn that their sheep were infected. She had assumed they were free of M/V but tests came back 33% positive. Stefania says that ". . . was a shock to me since I was growing up in Iceland when the battle with M/V was going on there and, even though I was just a child and lived in the city, I was aware of how serious the M/V was to the sheep population in Iceland. What really hurt was that I had brought my disease-free Icelandic sheep into an infected flock already here on the farm."

So began an eradication program — "difficult, expensive, and emotionally draining" — that has been well documented in *The Shepherd* magazine and elsewhere. Stefania says that, "Even though I will never consider our flock 100% free of OPP, I feel that we have been successful in our effort. No ewes have tested positive since 1992 and only 2 or 3 rams (culled) since then." The Dignums have access to the Canadian government ELISA test. Stefania was one of the first to speak out on OPP and is willing to continue to share her experience with anyone thinking of fighting the disease.

HOLLY NEATON, DVM

11549 Highway 25 SW, Watertown, Minnesota 55388
612-955-2596

Holly and her husband Paul, along with their 3 young sons (ages, 8, 10 & 14), live on a farm that has been in Paul's family for over 100 years. Previously a partner for 18 years in a mixed large/small veterinary practice, Holly specialized in dairy and small ruminants. Earlier this year she began working in private industry, which allows her more time with her family and her flock of 60 registered purebred Polypays and Polypay crossbreds.

The Neatons have had sheep for 11 years. The high producing Polypays are on an accelerated lambing schedule — with a strict OPP eradication program in place. The flock is enrolled in NSIP and replacements are selected using rigid production-based guidelines.

Dr. Neaton has been a popular presenter at various sheep conferences and, in 1996, was given Minnesota's "Silver Bell Award" (purebred division) by her state association. She presently serves as president of the Minnesota Veterinary Medical Ass'n, is past chair of MVMA's Animal Welfare Committee, and also sits on Minnesota's Scrapie Certification Board.

Holly has been working with the OPP Society during the past year in a collaborative effort to evaluate diagnostic labs doing OPP testing. She looks forward to combining her study of OPP and her personal experience with the disease in order to help others with eradication/control programs. Her sage advice: "Don't EVER stop testing! An infected though negative-testing (at the time) ram was put in with my negative Polypay ewes — and within 2 years the ewe flock converted to 75% sero-positive."

GRETTA MACINTYRE, a former nominee for the OPP Society board who is now concentrating her efforts on serving her breed association, lives with her husband Jim on their 180 acre farm in Pennsylvania. A Border Leicester breeder since 1979, Gretta says she has "been blessed with an OPP-negative flock." Her sheep are also at "Level B" in the five-year Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program.

Gretta recently left her position as a social worker on the oncology unit of a small hospital to be a full time farmer. Though her county has the highest number of sheep in the state, she says that ". . . many are old timers and tend to be short-sighted, especially regarding health issues." Gretta is excited about the possibility of a National Flock Health Certification Program coming into being and says, "It's time to make a difference."

OPP - Popular Topic at OSU Sheep Day

by Judy Sanders

On July 12th, Ohio State University held its first Sheep Day in six years, with numerous presentations and project demos. One topic drawing many comments and questions was OPP. Dr. William Shulaw discussed the disease and gave an update on current research findings. OSU is working with a number of flocks in Ohio to eliminate or control OPP.

Contrary to expectations, they have found that the main costs from the disease are not in poor lamb growth from udder damage, but in the early loss of breeding ewes from the flock necessitating constant replacements. The rate of loss has been noted to increase over the time the flock is infected, with ewes being lost at a younger age.

OSU is recommending two approaches to controlling the disease, depending on the percentage of the flock infected. In the early stages of exposure when no more than 10-15% test positive, good results are being obtained with a strict test-and-cull regimen. All animals are tested at least yearly and all positive reactors are culled at once.

At higher infection rates, Dr. Shulaw is recommending orphan rearing of lambs, followed by test-and-cull. Testing of orphans is still needed because cases of in-utero transmission from infected dams has been documented. It is also essential that the orphan-reared stock not be put back in contact with the infected animals due to lateral transmission.

Dr. Shulaw ruefully stated that OSU's own flock is currently 70-80% infected. It is not possible to cull their flock because the animals are needed as research subjects. The school hopes to stock a separate facility near Marietta with orphan-reared animals, eventually paving the way to eliminate the infected flock.

OSU has been comparing AGID and ELISA tests and presently relies on AGID because the test is standardized and repeatable. They are not currently recommending ELISA tests due to the lack of a standard test and the highly variable results; however, they feel the ELISA technology has great promise and intend to continue to research it. Dr. Shulaw said that OSU is now reliably detecting infected animals with AGID tests at less than 1 year old and recommends testing replacement animals starting at 6 months of age if trying to clean up a heavily infected flock. He feels this lessens the chance for lateral transmission. AGID tests can be relied on to not give false positive results.

Ohio is now doing AGID tests, charging only for the cost of the test materials; while neighboring West Virginia currently does OPP tests for residents at no charge.

Where to Test

The majority of U.S. labs providing AGID testing for OPP use the Antibody Test Kit supplied by Veterinary Diagnostic Technology of Wheatridge, Colorado. *This is the only OPP test kit licensed by the USDA.* Listed here are 52 different labs having purchased this test kit during the past year.

ARKANSAS LIVESTOCK & POULTRY COMMISSION
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS AT DAVIS, SAN
BERNADINO, & FRESNO
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY AT ROCKY FORD & FORT
COLLINS
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT
USDA, APHIS, NVSL, DIAGNOSTIC VIROLOGY LAB.
FLORIDA DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
IDAHO DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
ILLINOIS DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY IN KENTUCKY
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY
MARYLAND DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE IN FREDERICK &
COLLEGE PARK
MAINE DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI - COLUMBIA
MONTANA STATE VET. DIAG. LAB.
NORTH CAROLINA DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA - LINCOLN
UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
NEW JERSEY DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
NEW MEXICO DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
CORNELL UNIVERSITY
OHIO DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY
PENNSYLVANIA DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
QUAKERTOWN VET. CLINIC IN QUAKERTOWN, PA
CLEMSON LIVESTOCK LABORATORY
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY AT COLLEGE STATION
VETERINARY MEDICAL LAB., INC. AT AUSTIN, TX
UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY AT LOGAN & PROVO
VIRGINIA DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE AT WHTHEVILLE,
WARRENTON, & IVOR
WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
WISCONSIN DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
WEST VIRGINIA DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
WYOMING STATE VETERINARY LABORATORY

Bylaws Being Reviewed

The Opp Concerned Sheep Breeders Society is now seven years old — time to take a good look at our by-laws. Miller Lavengood is heading up a committee to determine whether or not revisions are needed. All members are invited to comment. Please send your suggestions (or request for a copy of the bylaws if you don't have them on file) to Miller at: 1525 Deer Creek Road, Maple Plain, MN 55359 (phone: 612-472-2344).

USDA veterinary researcher Jim Keen has two OPP papers in a recent issue of Preventive Veterinary Medicine (30, 1997). Titled "Effect of ewe ovine lentivirus infection on ewe and lamb productivity" (pp 155-169) and "Risk factors for seroprevalence of ovine lentivirus in breeding ewe flocks in Nebraska, USA" (pp 81-94). Dr. Keen says, "I found that a relatively short distance (about 50 feet) is apparently sufficient to prevent transmission between a highly OPP-infected flock and a negative one. . . this supports the theory that the OPP virus requires close contact for transmission to occur." Jim goes on to say that, "At MARC (Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Nebraska) we keep our OPP-free flock about 10 miles away from other sheep — this is probably overkill!" Look for more information in a future newsletter.

Clark BreDahl, popular columnist for *The Shepherd* magazine, addressed those attending the recent 45th Annual Spooner Sheep Day in Wisconsin. Confiding that he and Lyn have dispersed their flock — in part because of OPP — after having raised sheep for over 40 years, BreDahl offered a strong admonition for those who hope to remain in the sheep business: "We'll rebuild our flock, aiming to keep OPP out. I am absolutely amazed that this disease has been allowed free roam through our industry — much like its more publicized partner, scrapie. My opinion is that it is not possible for the sheep industry to co-exist with either of them. They have to go or we will. And we'll personally look to breeders who share that belief when we go to buy."

McNally Makes a BIG Impact!

OPP awareness took a quantum leap recently — courtesy of nationally recognized sheep educator/consultant Janet McNally of Minnesota. Those subscribed to "Sheep-L" were treated to an excellent thread on OPP during which she took on all skeptics and even slipped in a plug for the OPPCSB. Janet nearly wore out her keyboard answering questions and sharing details of how she eliminated OPP from her flock of Booroola Dorsets (now 200+ ewes). One understated response: "You have been eloquent and quite convincing in advocating the eradication of OPP." We'll be sharing some of Janet's wisdom with you in a future issue of this newsletter.

OPP Society Brochures Now Available

Enclosed please find one of our new brochures. These were introduced at the annual OPPCSB meeting in early April and have been making the rounds. Many thanks to veterinarians Mary Gessert, Paul Hunter, Jim Keen and Bill Shulaw who have distributed them in recent speaking engagements. Others we know of who have been helping include Sandy DeMaster, Patty Hurwitz, Miller & Kathy Lavengood, Gretta MacIntyre, and Kris Savage. If you can put some of these out at a conference or other sheep gathering, please let us know how many you need. An 8x10 mini-poster (slips into an inexpensive clear plastic easel frame) goes along to attract attention.

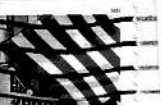
— LAST CALL FOR UPDATES —

The OPP Concerned Sheep Breeders Society Annual Directory will be printed soon. Please be sure your dues are paid and that Mary Jarvis has your current information.

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