



JOHNE'S DISEASE

What is Johne's Disease?

Animal Health Australia describes Johne's Disease as –

“a serious wasting disease that affects a wide range of animals. In Australia it has been found in cattle, sheep, goats, deer, alpaca and llama. It is caused by bacteria (Mycobacterium paratuberculosis) that live mainly in animal intestines but can also survive in the outside environment for several months.

Johne's disease affects animals by causing a thickening of the intestinal wall which blocks the normal absorption of food. The animal is hungry and eats but cannot absorb any nutrients. This results in wasting and finally death. Diarrhoea and bottle jaw are also common signs in cattle.”

Johne's Disease in Australia

Presently there are 4 known infected herds of deer in Australia compared with 1,030 herds of cattle, 17 goat herds and 1,953 flocks of sheep. Cross infections can occur from cattle and sheep to deer as deer have been known to be infected by bovine Johne's Disease (BJD) and ovine Johne's Disease (OJD). So care should be taken where paddocks are utilized by deer and cattle/sheep. As the bacteria is found in the stools from infected animals it is also possible that the runoff from neighbouring properties (if infected) could infect your property.

There are a growing number of Australian flocks/herds being vaccinated for Johne's Disease. However, it must be noted that the present vaccines do not cure an animal, only extend its lifespan. It will still shed and the load burden on the paddocks will increase.

At present there are NO approved tests for deer. An Australian ELISA test is presently awaiting SCAHLS approval (the Australian/New Zealand veterinary approval body). When this becomes available we can instigate the deerMAP program, which is similar to the programs used for cattle, sheep, goats and alpaca.

In the interim there are steps you can take to reduce the risk of infection:

- ▶ When buying new animals check the status of the exporting farm, especially if it is in an endemic area
- ▶ Check the status of your neighbouring properties
- ▶ Avoid feeding grain on the ground, especially in wet or muddy areas, as the disease thrives in wet conditions
- ▶ Regularly check for especially thin or scouring animals
- ▶ Reduce stock rates, especially if feeding weaners in an enclosed area
- ▶ Do not mix vaccinated sheep/cattle with non-infected deer

For further information, check the Animal Health Australia website
www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au