



Rib fractures

Connecting people in the business of sheep

KEY MESSAGES

- Rib fractures is caused by an imbalance of a number of elements
- Production losses can occur on farm and also at the abattoir
- Treatment is dependant on being able to determine the underlying cause

What causes rib fractures?

The cause of rib fractures is complex and can involve the deficiency or imbalance of the following:

- Vitamin D
- Calcium and phosphorous; and
- Copper and molybdenum (and iron and sulphur)

The end result is weak bones that break easily. Most commonly rib fractures are seen in fast growing lambs on lush pastures.

Deficiencies can be primary (caused by dietary deficiencies). For example:

- Cereal and grass hays and green oats are deficient in calcium. Problems are seen in late winter or early spring
- Lush grazed pasture has a low availability of copper compared with conserved forage

Internal parasites can also interfere with the uptake of calcium in the diet by damaging the intestinal lining. The most significant parasite involved is the black scour worm *Trichostrongylus vitrinus*.

Most common deficiencies are secondary, that is they are caused by other factors.

For example:

- Lush green feed contains anti-vitamin D substances
- High grain diets contain excess phosphorous, this results in calcium deficiency if calcium is not added to the ration
- Molybdenum, iron and sulphur act to bind copper and cause deficiency

Economic considerations

On Farm

Production loss can result from

- Slow maturation, later turn-off
- Ill thrift
- Anorexia and weight loss; and
- Infertility

At the Abattoir

Losses occur from

- Trimming – affected rib cages are trimmed from the carcass, this loss of weight is significant. This results in reduced carcass/dressed weights.

Treatment

Treatment is dependent on the underlying cause of the problem (based on examination and blood analysis) and may involve:

- Providing a trace mineral mix or other oral or injectable supplement (based on the specific deficiency).
- Adding hay to the diet – if grazing rapidly growing lush winter pasture or cereal crops.

Care must be taken with supplementation to avoid causing further harm with toxicity (by giving the wrong type or amount of supplementation).

Affected stock should be rested and nursed for

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several weeks to allow recovery, however some animals may need to be euthanased on welfare grounds.

For further information

Contact the Enhanced Abattoir Surveillance (EAS) Program manager Dr Elise Matthews, your local veterinary practitioner, livestock consultant or local PIRSA Animal Health Officer.

FOR ANY SIGNS OF UNUSUAL OR SERIOUS ANIMAL DISEASE, PLEASE CALL THE 24/7 DISEASE WATCH HOTLINE: 1800 675 888.



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