Drench smart, cut costs

VET TALK

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WITH spring upon us, cattle, sheep and goat producers are likely to give their drench guns a workout between now and Christmas.

A lot of them will lose money along the way.

The experts tell me animal health inputs are not a large part of the cost of production, but drenches still cost money – and worms cost even more.

So how much do they cost?

Sheep worms, for example, cost about $369 million a year, about 90 per cent of which is largely invisible from production loses.

How do you manage worms?

Tips To Save

- Know your drenches. Do a DrenchTest (a faecal egg count reduction test). This is like a mini trial on your farm.
- More simply, do regular DrenchChecks. Generally this just involves a worm egg count (WEC) seven to 10 days after using an anthelmintic.
- WEC is your friend. WormTest often.
- Avoid unnecessary drenching, especially of adult animals.
- Use effective drenches. Consider using combination drenches, products combining unrelated broad spectrum anthelmintics.
- Rotate drenches, whether annually or otherwise. In sheep this might mean rotating between macrocyclic lactones (ML) and non-ML based combinations.
- Use an effective quarantine drench. You don't need someone's resistant worms.
- Practice integrated parasite management (IPM): good genes, good food and rotational grazing as well as the right drench at the right time can mean more profit and better animal welfare.
- Avoid drenching when there are few worms on pasture, for example during drought or prolonged dry spells.

Further information:

- Wormboss – www.wool.com/wormboss
- MLA website – www.mla.com.au
- *Turning the Worm* (TTW) Issues 11, 12, and 22 – http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/resources/periodicals/newsletters/turning-the-worm
- Livestock Health, NSW Department of Industry and Investment website – http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/health
- *New Zealand Veterinary Journal*, December 2006. (Summarised in TTW Issues 22).

Integrated parasite management (IPM) includes non-chemical and chemical control measures.

The non-chemical parts include animal genetics, nutrition and grazing management.

The chemical part of the package obviously is treating animals with anthelmintics or drenches.

Treatments include effective quarantine drenches, so you do not import resistant worms, as well as treatments guided by a worm control plan, finetuned by regular worm egg count monitoring.

For sheep and goat producers, you almost certainly have resistant worms on your farm.

(Cattle producers need not be smug: your turn is coming).

And, I reckon 90pc or more of you don't precisely know what resistant worms you have – that is, which drenches work on your farm, and how well.

There is probably no drench on the market in Australia that is not affected by resistance, but how common is resistance to the various drenches?

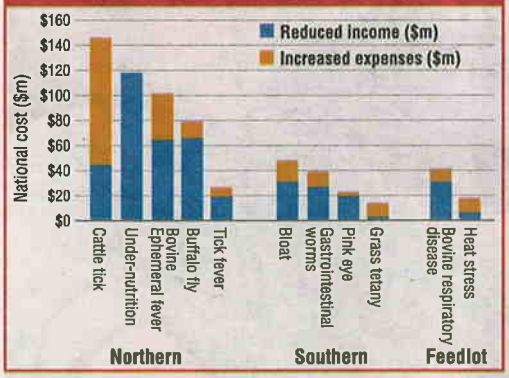
Here is a thumbnail sketch (above right).

These numbers vary with the region, worm species, and the individual drench being used.

How many producers have tested their drenches in the past three years?

Probably no more than 10pc, so many of you are still losing money unnecessarily.

National cost of diseases to the beef industry



Percent of Australian Sheep Farms with resistant worms

Drench family	Percent of farms
Levamisole ('LEV')	90
Benzimidazole ('white', 'BZ')	90
BZ/LEV combination	60-80
Macrocyclic lactone (ML, 'mectin')	Up to 80%

What about cattle worms? To date, there are few Australian reports of drench resistant cattle worms in the scientific journals.

However, field reports of resistance in Australia have increased steadily recently.

We do after all use drenches a fair bit, sometimes in ways that tend to promote resistance, for example, frequent treatments of macrocyclic lactones (ML) product to control cattle tick, and unnecessary treatment of adult animals.