

LIVING WITH LEPTO

Hilson R

Vet Services (HB) Ltd, PO Box 503, Waipukurau

Roger Marshall, Massey University, 1988:

"the world is a sea of leptospire"

While recent New Zealand research indicates that leptospire exposure and/or infection is a relatively common in sheep, deer and beef cattle in much of the country, clinical disease of livestock requiring veterinary involvement is rare.

Over the last twenty years veterinarians at the Waipukurau clinic have been involved in at least ten cases in sheep, ten cases in deer and eight cases in beef cattle. We are also aware of eleven farmers and veterinarians who have been clinically affected with leptospirosis in that time.

However, the issue should to be put in perspective. With 170,000 beef cattle, 29,000 deer and 1,290,000 sheep in Central Hawkes Bay, there is ample opportunity for infection with a conservative 15 million animal handling episodes occurring annually. The author has been infected with *L. Pomona*, presumably from hoggets at pregnancy scanning. He is often involved with farmers and their families when suspect or proven cases of human leptospirosis occur. This involvement has been significant when clients require information and in particular when badly affected farmers do not act promptly when they become ill. In some cases the patient has been seen by a GP but has been reluctant to revisit the doctor as they become clinically worse.

Similarly, advice regarding human safety and the potential for infection must be delivered when investigating a leptospirosis outbreak in livestock as the treatment of infected stock and in-contacts will involve significant risk for handlers, working dogs and other livestock. In one recent case where staff had butchered several ill hoggets, it was necessary to arrange for all farm staff to visit their GPs to receive prophylactic antibiotics.

Veterinarians should not underestimate the importance of their role in the practical approach to diagnosis and treatment of leptospirosis in domestic animals and their handlers.