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DISEASES OF BABY LAMBS

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This is the time of year when sheepmen talk about the percentage of lambs they are getting, and the losses they are having. Why should so many lambs die suddenly? Why this stiffness and lameness? Why so many cases of scours? Why should such things happen to lambs that seemed to start so well? The evidence seems to point directly to infection, germs that gain entrance to the body of the lamb at the time it is dropped, one of the chief avenues of infection being through the stub of the navel cord.

Symptoms and Lesions of Navel Infection

In order to understand the symptoms and lesions that develop in newborn lambs as a result of infection taking place through the navel cord, it is necessary to understand something of the circulation of blood that exists during the time the lamb is being carried by its mother. There is no direct exchange of blood between mother and lamb. The blood flows from the body of the lamb to the membranes enclosing it and back again through arteries and veins. When the lamb is born these blood vessels, together with a tube leading to the bladder, make up what is known as the navel cord. The veins are carrying blood from the membranes to the liver of the lamb. From the liver this blood goes to the heart. After the lamb is dropped the blood begins circulating through the lungs, going from the lungs back to the heart to be pumped to the rest of the body. Knowing something of where these channels lead, it is not difficult to understand why abscesses develop in the liver, why lambs are found with inflammation of the heart, and why pneumonia is common in lambs only a few days old. Bacteria in the blood stream may reach one or more joints and grow there, thus causing lameness and abscesses of the joints.

Inflammation of the bladder is common, because germs often pass along the tube from the navel to this organ. Naturally the symptoms which develop vary according to the part of the lamb which is affected. Some show indications of pneumonia, others develop lameness, and still others may die so quickly that very few symptoms are observed.

Diagnosis

Sometimes the symptoms are so typical that a diagnosis is easily made. At other times it may require examinations of dead lambs to determine what is causing the trouble. It is best to have such examinations made by someone trained in recognizing disease. It doesn't do any good to look at a dead lamb if you don't know the difference between a healthy lung and pneumonia or between a normal kidney and one that is inflamed.

Treatment

Treatment consists chiefly in prevention. Once the above described symptoms and lesions have developed very little can be done to stop losses. The infection can be prevented in two ways--first, by seeing that the lamb is dropped in a clean place, and second, by the treatment of the umbilical cord as soon after birth as possible. By clean place is meant a place practically free from disease-producing bacteria. A place may look clean and still may have enough disease-producing germs on it to kill all the sheep in Oregon. Lambing sheds should be cleaned and disinfected. Remember that it is impossible to disinfect a manure pile. Manure should be removed, boards scraped and scrubbed with boiling water and lye. New, clean straw should be provided frequently. If ewes are to lamb outside they should be in a pasture not regularly used by sheep. Heavy losses have resulted from ewes lambing in corrals that had been used by sheep for many years. Ewes should be tagged, for the possibility of navels becoming infected from soiled wool should not be neglected.

One hesitates to describe the method of preventing this trouble by the use of tincture of iodine because sheepmen are apt to rely on this method and neglect the practice of sanitation, but since it does produce results it should be described. Cords that are to be treated with iodine should be cut off with scissors or a knife, because the longer the cord the longer it takes to dry up and the greater the danger of infection. There can be no necessity of having the cord more than two inches long and in this length iodine is easily and thoroughly applied. The iodine should be purchased in a wide mouth bottle having a capacity of at least four ounces. In applying the iodine the mouth of the bottle is placed over the navel cord, with the cord inside and then with bottle held tightly to the belly of lamb, bottle and all should be turned upside down. Only a few seconds is required for the operation and the cord is assured of a good soaking. Ordinary tincture of iodine seems to give the best results and should not be diluted.

SORE MOUTH

The scabs that appear on the lips and gums of baby lambs are caused by a virus, a disease-producing agent so small it cannot be seen even with the aid of a microscope. The disease runs a course of about 10 days, and most of the lambs recover. Some cases become so severe that the lamb finds it impossible to nurse. Occasionally lesions develop on the udder of the ewe. One attack of the disease produces an immunity. If lambs develop sore mouth, remove scabs and apply undiluted sheep dip. Generally one application gives results. Care should be used in treating animals, as several people have had scratches infected from these sores. Scabs that fall off the affected lambs carry the cause of the trouble. They are dangerous for at least several months. Any shed or corral in which sheep affected with this trouble have been kept should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before it is used again.

SORE EYES

Sore eyes are generally due to turned-in eye lids. This condition is inherited and if common in new lambs attention should be paid to methods of breeding. The condition can only be relieved by cutting an elliptical piece of skin out of the affected lid. This will cause the eye lashes to be retracted when the wound closes in healing. The piece to be removed should be quite narrow and should be elliptical in the horizontal direction of the eye lid. To hasten recovery the eye may be treated with 15% solution of argyrol.
