

Sheep Farming - Ovine Brucellosis and ram management with Scott Parry_FINAL 3

(Intro snippet) [00:00:00]

Scott Parry: Why should producers be worried about it? Quite simply, ovine brucellosis is going to reduce the number of lambs you get on the ground, the number of lambs you mark, and then ultimately the number of lambs that you load onto that B double or that you run across the shearing board.

Kieran Smith: welcome back to another episode of the Pastoral Poddy. I'm your host, Kieran Smith, livestock Advisor with Western LLS. Today's episode is focused on sheep production. However, there's plenty of learnings for all livestock producers in this episode, I'm joined by Scott Parry, veterinarian with Western LLS and a pretty familiar face in the region.

Scott spends a lot of his time working directly with producers on animal health, productivity, and biosecurity. And today we're diving into a disease that often flies under the radar but can have some pretty serious consequences. For flock performance, we're talking about the silent thief of productivity.

ovine brucellosis . A reproductive disease that can quietly chip away at lambing [00:01:00] percentages, ram performance, and ultimately profitability. We're going to unpack what it is, how to detect it, and what producers can do to manage and prevent it

We'll also chat about Ram Health more generally, disease risks in Western LLS and some exciting research. And a few stories from Scott's time on the road as a vet.

Scott, thanks for joining us today,

Scott Parry: Oh, thanks Kieran. Thanks for having me, mate.

Kieran Smith: Before we get into the serious stuff, if you had a hundred thousand acres anywhere in Western LLS, . Where would it be and what would you run?

Scott Parry: Look, that's a great question. For me it probably comes down to a choice of two. I think I think if I could have a hundred thousand acres with a fair wedge of that cutter borough basin country north west of Burke there. I think that'd be pretty nice up around sort of Kiora Sandy Point that neck of the woods. So I really like it up there. But the other spot that I've got a really soft spot for is the blue overflow country there on the, particularly on that northern side of the cut line as you get out around Tibbuburra

So that [00:02:00] country like oh, furlough, delal Clifton Downs. That neck of the woods there. I really love that, that far western country. You know, a bit of combination of flood country and you get into some sand dunes and giber country too. And um, yeah, it's , just good stuff. But I've done a reasonable amount of sheep work over the years, but fair bit of my work's been cattle and I think I'd have to go for a black baldy herd of cows and some sort of a black bull to put over 'em and turn off some fairly handy feeder steers would be my plan.

Kieran Smith: Yep. Very good. No offense to the sheep producers who are gonna be tuning into this

Scott Parry: episode. Oh, none at all. And just a quick shout out to my good friend Tim goal at for flock sake, he's always calling cattle a secondary ruminant. We'll agree to disagree on that one, Tim.

Kieran Smith: The next one for you is , what do you think one of the strangest callouts you've ever had as a vet is?

Scott Parry: I've done a little bit of camel work , and so when you get called out to I did get a job to geld. I'd never geld at a camel before, but we did 12 basically. Camels had been run , outta the bush one time. That was a pretty weird one. And I suppose oh, I guess working in the uk , not so much call outs, but when you were, when I did a [00:03:00] little bit of small animal work over there, if you poked your head around the corner of the consult room and you saw a an English client sing there with a toaster box on his lap or her lap you generally knew that it was gonna be some form of small mammal that you didn't know the name of.

Could have been a chinchilla or a gerbil or a hamster or something. So, some of my adventures in, in small exotic animal land , were probably some of my weirder ones. So I guess it's down to dead heat between camels and gerbils mate.

Kieran Smith: Yeah, they go. , So between camels and gerbils, how did you find yourself doing blood testing of rams in Western New South Wales?

Scott Parry: Mate,

It's been bit of a long and winding road. for the NRL fans out there. I liken myself to a player called Kevin Campion, who I think played for six different clubs and got about 271st grade games. Played a bit of a representative footy, but he was always known as real journeyman.

And I suppose I've been a bit of a journeyman over the years. How'd I come to be out here, worked through Queensland and Northern New South Wales for a number of years, and my wife is also a vet. We got [00:04:00] married nearly 30 years ago and yeah, after 10 years of moving around and working in the UK and what have you, we eventually settled in,, Coonamble and, , we had a private practice there for 20 years.

Coonamble, Walgett and Lightning Ridge, and we sold that onto two great young vets back in 2022. , Charlie Milthorpe and Emily Warner. And they're doing a great job and, . Kylie and I stepped back a little bit from the day to day running of that, and I was looking for something, , to keep me, , gainfully employed and outta the pub and, , Western ILS were looking for a vet to fill a few gaps, before they could get a, some more permanent vets. So I. I have, been a contract service provider to Western LLS, doing a lot of ram bleeding, as you say, , since, , the middle of 2023. So, yeah, as I say mate, bit of a journey, but yeah, it's been good fun and thoroughly enjoyed the opportunities that LLS have given me.

Kieran Smith: Very good. . It's been good to have you , in the region as well. And , , while we're touching on vets , , what sort of services,, can vets, , within the LLS offer?

Scott Parry: It comes broadly, down two main areas, Kieran.

There's just that general [00:05:00] phone support, you know. I have LLS clients who are, you know, I work with through LLS, , who will just ring you for just general advice, and particularly as season start to change and close in a bit. , They'll ring you for advice on, you know, should we send some cattle on adjustment here or what should we be doing with these rams?

You know, should we be acclimatizing them out in the western country before we, you know, after we , bring 'em out from the inside country? That type of

thing. So Producers, having a good relationship with your local LLS vet. Is just a fantastic resource for them to be able to bounce a few ideas , off that vet , and pick their brains, , about general animal health and biosecurity issues.

You know, like , a 10 minute conversation about a biosecurity issue can potentially, save a client. Tens, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars, in preventing a , animal health or disease disaster. , And I guess , the other big thing that vets in Western can do , is obviously the field work , and field work is based around more proactive types of activities, which I'm sure will get right into the weeds with the ovine brucellosis thing.

But [00:06:00] obviously we offer that service of, diagnosing and managing Ovine brucellosis in flocks but also mortality investigations. So a producer goes out in the Land Cruiser one morning and finds a, you know, an unusual cluster of deaths in a group of animals. Goats, cattle, whatever the case may be.

We've actually talking of strange call outs, we've actually investigated ducks and peacocks dying at one stage here just south of Bourke. But they're all, they're all technically livestock, so they're all all worthy , of our attention. But yeah, so mortality investigations very important, particularly because we do get a smattering of anthrax.

, Through the western country here. And I guess the other things are like just more subclinical disease, like suboptimal production. Issues, you know, a group of animals that aren't performing as well as they should do in terms of perhaps reproductively or just in terms of weight gain that type of thing.

So, they're the big things that we can offer. But when it boils down to it, it's animal health, welfare, and biosecurity are the services we offer.

Kieran Smith: Scott, we're here today talking [00:07:00] about Ovine Brucellosis firstly, what is it and why should a Landholder be conscious of it?

Scott Parry: So Brucellosis is a bacterial disease of sheep. . The brucellosis family of bacteria for the older for. More mature, dare I say it listeners out there people will remember the the BTEC campaign in cattle, which is brucellosis tuberculosis eradication campaign.

So we got in and eradicated Brucellosis in cattle. Gee, I was only a bit of a kid when it was finished up. So that probably wrapped up in the eighties, maybe the early nineties. The Brusso side of it. TB sort of dragged on a bit more. But brusso in sheep is same family of organism, but some significant differences.

The main one being it's not a zoonotic disease. Okay, so. People can't catch it from sheep. That's the first thing. So ovine brucellosis is a bacterial disease of sheep. But it is not a zoonosis. So, that's one thing to clear up there is sometimes that [00:08:00] that bit of a bit of confusion there.

And there's also. Brucellosis in pigs that gets into dogs and can also be a serious zoonotic disease of, humans. But thankfully considering how much brucellosis Ovis there is out there it's not a zoonotic disease.

What does it do, mate? , The simplest explanation is it causes a drop off in fertility of your sheep flock.

Primarily a disease of rams. So they'll get an oras and epididimitis, which all the. Male listeners out there will probably cross their legs when they hear this, but it's like a severe inflammation of , the testicles and the associated structures there. And that will cause a drop off infertility in the ram because, when he's all his wedding tackle is a bit inflamed.

He's not performing at his best. It can also cause abortion in ewes. And there have been reports, I believe, of it causing an increase in deaths in really young lambs as well. So, yeah, that, that's what it is. Bacterial disease primarily affects fertility in sheep.

Why [00:09:00] should producers be worried about it? Quite simply, it's going to reduce the number of lambs you get on the ground, the number of lambs you mark, and then ultimately the number of lambs that you load onto that B double or that you run across the shearing board.

Kieran Smith: What are the sort of signs , or symptoms or , ways that a producer might , identify that , they've got an issue , or start ,. Suspecting it might be an issue.

Scott Parry: Great question, Kieran. Because, if you don't know to look for something, you're not gonna find it, that's for sure. , And I think there, to my way of thinking , as a primarily a field vet, the two main ways that a producer will pick up on it will be drop off in lamb marking and lamb weaning percentages.

And the other one is, particularly if they get a bit hands-on with their rams and they just check and they're checking their rams pre joining they'll notice. Sometimes you will notice that actual swelling and hardening of the affected testicles. Not every ram that has brucellosis ends up with a hardened, tail of the

epididymis or hardened testicle. So not everyone that has brusso has that. And likewise, not every RAM that has [00:10:00] a hard testicle, epididymis has brusso. But what I would say is, particularly in flocks that have a high rate of brusso infection in the RAM cohort, so you know that anything above 10, 15% of your rams affected, you will start to feel higher than.

Normal percentage of them with that really hardened tail of the epididymis. And in simple terms, the tail of the EPIs is a little knob on the bottom end of the testicle. So for those who want to try it at home, when you're palpating the testicle, you go down the body of the testicle and you get to the bottom and there's a distinct bulb or yeah, bump at the bottom of that testicle.

That's the tail. of your epididymis. If it's hard, if it's starting to almost feel as though if you're struggling to feel a differentiation between the testicle and the tail of the epididymis , there's a fair chance you'll have Bruce. So you should at least have a look for it. So if you had a drop off in lambing rates, and you had some rams that you thought their testicles didn't look or [00:11:00] feel normal, I would be getting straight on the phone and speaking to Western LLS one of the vets.

Kieran Smith: Yep. , So say last year I had a quite a low lambing percentage. And yeah, I've just brought in , my Rams for a bit of a pre joinin exam this year. , Just to have a look over the Rams. , What's an ideal time to be looking over those rams prior to joining? , , And what should we be looking for in those rams?

Scott Parry: Yeah. Another great question, mate. If you don't end up having brusso six weeks before joining is probably heaps of time. You can go through.

Sort out your animals that that are, lame, blind, diseased, you know, animals that are going a bit gummy, get rid of them. Big thing with, the big thing with that time is that you've got enough time to source more rams to replace the ones you kick out. Okay. So that's assuming you don't have Bruco

So, so if you're just doing a pre joining examination yeah. Like 4, 6, 8 weeks before you joined. I would think would be plenty of time, so long as you've got time to get in and replace rams , that you kick out. Now, if you do have brusso, that's where it can get a bit tricky because to detect brucellosis, , the gold standard for [00:12:00] it is a blood test.

It's actually reasonably simple. You just collect, anything more than three or four mls of blood outta the jugular vein. Of your ram and you get that te we get

that tested with the New South Wales DPI laboratory. At EMAI if you come up with some positives, to get really good control of bruso and that flock, to eradicate it, basically you need to continue to bleed until you get two clear rounds.

Now, you can't just go in, there's no point in bleeding. What's today, Wednesday, bleeding Wednesday. Get the results. Thursday, which you wouldn't get, but let's say you got 'em Thursday and then bleed again Friday. No point in doing that. , So , what I generally recommend in flocks that really want to go hard at it is we bleed every three to four weeks.

We go in really hard bleed every three to four weeks and just keep pulling the positives out. Send them to Uncle Roger or, whatever you wanna do with them. , Get them outta your flock. So my point being, if you think you have a bruso problem, you need to start well before joining to get on [00:13:00] top of it.

And to me, probably the ideal time to start would be six to eight weeks after the end of joining. That's how far ahead you really need to be thinking, particularly , if you think you've got a problem. . Does that make sense? I know it's a bit of a long-winded way of saying it, but Yeah. , You need to have plenty of time up your sleeve to.

To get on top of the problem.

Kieran Smith: . , And just in terms of prevalence of what you've seen , around the west, , there's , not a great deal of exact figures or an exact cost to the industry. There's a few sort of estimates , , of up to , , potentially, 20 to 30% of flocks being infected. Would that sort of be around what your observations are or is it a bit hard to tell?

Scott Parry: it, , It'd be hard to put a number on it. Oh, my gut feeling would be, probably not,, a long way off the mark. And .

As you say, it's difficult to get accurate figures on it. 'cause we don't bleed every flock in the west. We don't bleed every flock in Australia. , But I think in, I would argue in Western we've got a fairly, good market, coverage. Like we, we do bleed quite a few flocks.

But [00:14:00] I would think it would not be unusual for if I was to do five fresh flocks that I hadn't bled before in a week. , I would be surprised if I didn't get at least one or two of them coming up with some positive. So yeah, there's plenty

of it out there and without, , I guess the old dorper merino argument is one that's gonna be along the same lines as Toyotas versus Nissan Nissans.

But I don't think there's any doubt that Dorpers are fairly mobile. I haven't seen anything to suggest that there are any more susceptible to getting Brusso. But I. Think the fact that they may be a little bit more mobile has made that population of Rams a bit more susceptible to getting it, I would argue.

But, there's plenty of well-managed flocks out there that have no trouble with brusso at all. And it just comes back to the attitude of the producer if they're proactive in getting on top of it. They'll be fine. But I do wonder if that has perhaps contributed to to some of , the widespread nature of it in the Western division.

Kieran Smith: So say I've got a flock that's, , More of a [00:15:00] use that's given me 130% lambs in, in the past, and all of a sudden I'm down to. 60 just over the, over the next lambing. So I've gone out, done my pre joining exam on the Rams. , found some lumps , called the vet, got a few tests.

, Identified that it was ovine brucellosis , within that flock. But I've had perfect lambing rates in the past. , What are some of the ways that a producer might be able to introduce brucellosis . Onto their property?

Scott Parry: One of the things I say to people is it doesn't happen by magic. Okay? There's no magic tricks. Like a genie doesn't pop out of a bottle and suddenly give you brusso on your property. far and away, the most common method of introduction is to infected rams.

So a ram that you have bought, a ram that has like a stranger that's walked in through a fence, one of your rams that's gone and visited his girlfriend on a neighboring property that may have it. Or girlfriend or boyfriend for that matter. Because it does spread between Rams so one of your rams that's gone away and then come back with it.

Infected Rams getting into your flock [00:16:00] are far and away the most common way of it being introduced now Ewes , can introduce it. Ewes don't tend to carry the disease chronically. So that's one thing I think probably an important distinction to make ewes don't tend to be chronic carriers.

They can be, but it's not. Particularly common, and I've never diagnosed it in a ewe per se. Whereas Rams, once Rams got it, he's got it for life. Like there's no cure. You, like I said before, you've gotta basically dispose of him. , So the way

it would most likely happen would be , you've introduced, ewes from an infected flock, scanned in lamb.

Most likely they've come on a, ewe has aborted and one of your rams has mated that ewe, whilst she's still got the infection, simmering away there or come into contact with the infected fetal fluids and what have you. So, , most common way infected rams, how they . Come to be on your property?

It varies. I suppose like unmusterable populations of rams, , they represent a, a real [00:17:00] issue too. They can be a real reservoir infection, particularly in the west on these really big block.

Kieran Smith: And just continuing on from that, so I guess in a controlled mating type system where you're keeping records of the , numbers joined, number of lambs marked , on an annual basis, it's, yeah, I guess easier to determine what sort of lambing percentages you've had of then pick up a potential crash in lambing that way. But for some of these continuous mating sort of systems, which are fairly common in, in Western New South Wales, how does that affect the ability to detect the prevalence , of the disease?

And also as far as. Continuing infection. Yeah. , Having these sort of year round systems does that sort of proliferate , the infection rate as well of rams?

Scott Parry: Yeah, I, Absolutely. Yes. I, they, those systems. Once Brusso is established , in those type of production systems that you're talking about it can be really tough to get on top of it, Kieran.

And yes, it provides a , from a number of perspectives, like one. If you're continuously mating , or you see a [00:18:00] lot of this stuff, again, particularly with the, your shedding breeds where they might continuously mate, but they'll, they'll only pull rams out for six or eight weeks at a time just to give themselves, you know, a few batches of lambs through the year.

But for all intents and purposes, I guess it is a continuous mating. and particularly if they're not scanning and there's not a lot of pressure being put on your non-rearers and your non conceivers that you can mask your problem for quite a while because, you know, if you're just continually joining like , you can potentially judge a ewe that has a lamb on the 1st of January exactly the same as a ewe that has a lamb on the 31st of December.

And say both those Es had one lamb a year, but. It might might've taken one of them three or four joinings to get pregnant because of the brusso, if that makes

sense. So you can mask the problem because your rams aren't out for a long period of time.

It comes back to what I said about the eradication and control strategy. Like it's difficult to bleed often enough to get that prevalence right back [00:19:00] down in your RAM group. So you get it back down and you might be sort in control of it, and then you throw 'em out and you join 'em and bang, it gets away from you again.

And the other tricky thing comes back to. More of a, a weaning issue where you got. Ram lambs that once they get a bit of size about them, they can potentially catch it, like there is some spread through I believe through milk and just like I said through before, like through those contaminated fetal fluids from aborted ewes, that type of thing.

So then you get the issue of ram lambs that. Become infected early in life. And then if they become sexually active before they get the elastorator ring or the hot knife put on them, they can perpetuate the issue too. So the short answer to what is a really long, complicated, question is that yes, those continuous or rolling mating systems pose some real logistical issues to brusso control. And sometimes the best you can do in those [00:20:00] situations is not. aim for eradication. It's aimed to keep that prevalence as low as you can, but the only way to do that is for those guys to be getting in and bleeding probably at least twice a year and just getting rid of that tail of infected animals as often as they can and keep that ram cohort as clean as they can because , complete eradication in those systems, once the infection is really well established is really difficult, .

Kieran Smith: Just go back to a controlled mating system. So say I've got a hundred rams on my place. Got the LLS vet in. We've bled them all. Found that 10 of them have come back positive , for brucellosis. So from that point what's sort of my next best options?

And how would I go about continually Yeah. Testing the other animals and then also replacing those rams with some clean ones.

Scott Parry: So, ideal world, you've got 10 positives. You get that group of rams straight back in and you isolate those 10 rams. You send them to slaughter to market, you dispose of them humanely on property, whatever.

So that's the, the absolute first [00:21:00] priority is to minimize their potential to continue to spread the disease. If you are then committed to, if you have the resources like the physical and the financial resources to eradicate the disease,

as I say, we jump in and particularly if you've got a good long period before you wanna join next time.

If we've worked this out, you know, say it scanning or lamb marking, and hopefully we've got sort of six months up our sleeve before the next joining. We get in, we bleed every four weeks until we get too clear rounds. So by clear round, I just mean we bleed every ram. And they all come back negative.

Okay, so do that. Introducing Rams. So new Rams. So let's assume in my experience, if you had 10 positive rams out of a hundred, you've got a middling level of infection. I would probably expect to lose maybe 20 20 rams total in the eradication process. Give or take so let's say in the market for 20 new rams before the next joining.

A lot of studs, certainly in the Merino game and increasingly in in other breeds, a lot of studs will be [00:22:00] in a control scheme like New South Wales DPI runs an O OBAs, the OV Brucellosis Accreditation Scheme, it's a market assurance program like the old yonis ones and what have you.

Only this one actually really does work where you progress through a certain number of bleeds , and annual bleeds and then . Every two and every three year bleeds , so there's a high level of confidence that Stu has no bruso on it. And you can buy from them with confidence.

So if at all possible source your replacement rams from an accredited flock. If it's not an accredited flock, you either insist that those rams are bled clean before you introduce them. And if you are super cautious, regardless of where you get your rams from, you might get 'em from an accredited flock.

You might not, you would bleed them, before you join them on arrival at your property. Again, if you wanna put another layer of security on it, you would try and join those rams as a cohort to hopefully younger ewes who are less likely to have any chronic carriers in the group.

And you would [00:23:00] join them as a cohort together so that come clean and they stay clean. Hopefully the rest of your rams are clean. They probably are. But there are just a number of different layers biosecurity risk management that you can apply to the situation, but it all hinges on getting rid of those positives in the most time efficient manner you can.

, One thing to add. And then you really wanna make sure that you keep your property as bio secure as possible. So fencing, just fencing. So you know, in that

far western country where you've got sand dune country and that, that can be a real challenge like sand dunes moving around and creating great gaps under fences and what have you.

I, country that's got a lot of watercourse through it, you know, floodgates, that type of thing. They're all an issue, but once you've got it clean, you spend a lot of time and money getting it clean, really make the effort to keep it outta there. And fencing is your best friend there. Fencing and constant vigilance.

And two things I wanted to say were that just 'cause you've got Bruce, it doesn't mean you're not gonna get any lambs. [00:24:00] So, as I touched on before, like in some of these flocks, total eradication won't be, it just won't be possible.

But please be rest assured if you can keep that prevalence down below, say 5% of your rams, you will still get plenty of lambs. All other things being equal, you're better off without the disease. But if you, if the best you can do is to keep it damped right down without total eradication, that's still

gonna be better than doing nothing. And the other thing I just wanted to touch on, . One of the one of the compounding effects that you will find with having brucellosis in your flock, a compounding effect on lamb marking rates is the effect of predation.

Okay? Not everyone gets this, but it's one of the hidden costs. Of this disease. Like the disease itself is a bit of a hidden cost, but the hidden, there's a hidden cost. And I'm sitting in your office here looking at 10 80 wild dog and 10 80 pig poison and 10 80 fox poison signs there.

And . If you end up with brusso, your rams are less fertile. And so you're going, if you've got a chronic brusso problem, your rams gonna be less fertile.

[00:25:00] People go, oh, you know, my lambing percentage is just coming off the boil a little bit. I'll just leave the Rams out for an extra two weeks or another four weeks or something, and, and yeah, you'll get more lambs, but.

Suddenly, instead of having that really nice tight lambing pattern where you've got lambs that fall over four weeks or six weeks or what have you, suddenly it stretches out, you know, and suddenly you've got 'em over eight weeks worth of lambs, or 10 weeks or 12 weeks. And what happens is you provide that nice little snack size lamb for a big boar pig or a or a fox.

Those little snack size lambs are there on the smorgasbord menu for. A longer period of time, so you will magnify the effect of brusso via predation. So it's just

a, it's another great reason too. Don't drop the ball on predator control, but don't drop the ball on brusso either. 'cause one will magnify the other.

Sorry for ducking down that rabbit hole. But I just wanted to make sure that we mentioned that

Kieran Smith: Yeah, yeah, , for sure. And , I guess then there's yeah, beyond the predation, there's all the other flow on effects of [00:26:00] management.

Trying to muster when there's little lambs at foot. Yeah, you've got dealing with small lambs in the yards and having to leave ewes and lambs behind in a paddock, which then that can increase your, , continue worm burdens. . , , Down at the point of when you go to sell the lambs, all of a sudden you're haven't got one b-double full, , you've gotta split that over a couple of smaller loads and Yeah.

Scott Parry: absolutely. And like I know you've spent time in Northern Australia, the cattle industry there, and it's. Yeah, they're all the problems we see up in that country with the cattle game too. You know, as you say, like you and the country's bigger out here too, so you're not just mustering them out of a hundred acre paddock on the nice rolling tablelands country.

Like you, you might be using lambs out of a 10, 15, 20,000 acre paddock. As you say, if you've got a big, long. Tail of little baby lambs there and you, know, you're mustering for shearing or marking or whatever it is, and it's hot weather or long distances and dry weather and all the rest of it.

Yeah, like it, there's just so many opportunities for this disease to bite you on the bum. When you don't necessarily associate the disease with the effect.

Kieran Smith: So I guess to summarize all of that. Get [00:27:00] your rams in well before joining, keep an idea of a track of lamb marking percentages. Pregnancy scan. Palpating rams, if there's an issue give the vet a call, do some testing and then, yeah, plenty of ways , to reduce or eradicate the disease if it's prevalent. And then bringing in new stock , either bleeding them before they come onto the place, or if you can, purchasing rams through a accreditation schemes

that. . so now just moving on to a new project that's happening in Western New South Wales called , the Ram Power Project. So Scott, you've been, involved in this project what is it and what's it hope to achieve?

Scott Parry: Yeah, so the Ram Power project from. Memory, I think its Genesis was at the Packsaddle Pub where, Sophie Hemley who was my team leader for quite a while out here in Western. after doing a, I produce a workshop at Packsaddle. Soph and I were talking about the potential to do some work in Rams, in the Rangelands to [00:28:00] see if there are any objective measurements we could make of those rams to decide which ones are going to have a better lamb getting ability.

So rather than having a heap of hitchhikers. For want of a better word, you know, that, that aren't paying their way. How do we identify the rams that are gonna give you the best chance of getting quite a few lambs, like commercially viable number of lambs when they're joined?

So that's where it started from. To go step back from that, probably the. The idea that started the conversation was the Bull Power Project, in Queensland, in the nineties and early two thousands, basically what they did is they went out and they looked at, two or 300 bulls spread over a number of stations over a number of different geographical and grazing areas, you know, so there would've been Barkley cattle, there would've been gulf cattle.

There would've been forest country cattle. It would've been channel country and Southwest Queensland cattle. But what they did, was they, they took. As many as was practical objective measurements of those bulls before joining. So [00:29:00] they looked at scrotal circumference, scrotal tone semen volume, semen density, the morphology, so the shape of those individual semen.

They assessed sheath structure and the list goes on and on. I joke to people, they even measured how long their tail was and you know, whether their nose was pink or brown. and then, then they multiple, so I made those bulls and at marking time they went in and they DNA typed everyone on those bulls and then they They DNA typed the calves at marking time. So then I think everyone knows where this is going. They could. They could match the bulls to the calves and they could say, well, if there were three bulls in that paddock, well bull A, he got 70% of those calves. Bull B got 25% and Bull C got 5% of those calves.

And they went from there back to the measurements that they'd made pre joinin. Trying to find out , which measurement or measurements had the highest predictive value. pre-joining of whether that bull was going to be bull A, [00:30:00] B, or C.

And that's what we want to do with these Rams. So . We've identified a number of cooperator flocks through Western. We've gone in and we have done a pre

joining fertility assessment, including semen morphology , and a full semen assessment on those rams. And currently most of them have been joined or have been joined, and we've DNA typed, I think the first of the lamb cohorts.

So, yeah, we're trying to see , is there a measurement that can be made in Rams, pre joining that will determine Probably not necessarily looking for the, the absolute sexual athletes. What you're looking for are the absolute rubbish. And so you can get them outta your flock.

And I'll circle back to the bull thing. The big things we found in bulls were, they were obvious things like if the bull was lame, sure he's not gonna get a lot of calves. If he's got five centimeter scrotal circum, he's not gonna get many calves. Like there were quite a few obvious ones that we probably knew, but the really interesting one in bulls that has had.

I would say it's had one of the biggest effects on, bull buying , and cattle fertility [00:31:00] through, particularly in the beef sector, but also in the dairy sector. The big thing that came outta that study or one of the major things was that sperm morphology was the single factor that was the best predictor of whether a bull was going to have a high calf gaining ability or not.

So if that bull had. 50 to 70% normal sperm. There was a really strong chance he was going to get a viable number of calves, and if he had less than 50% normal sperm, there was a really strong chance that he wouldn't get many calves at all. And we're really interested to see if that.

Finding is born out in sheep. And then, and before you ask me, no, we dunno what any of the findings are yet.

Kieran Smith: So, don't have any findings yet. So, I guess what's the length of the project

Scott Parry: Look at the moment? Like everything depending on money we basically have, my understanding is and again, huge shout out to Soph Hemley for going out and, for finding the money for this. And a huge shout out to the, some of the top people in western LLS who got [00:32:00] behind us and supported this project. 'cause it was a bit of a, a blue sky thing.

, We've got enough to do one full round of Joinings and one full round of DNA testing as I understand it. So, we tested our last RAM cohort. Early January, so they won't be joined for a little while yet. So look, I would expect by the time we get the results in all the DNA testing and get that information away to our,

number crunches and epidemiologists and statisticians, we'd probably be starting to get a bit of an idea towards the end of this year. Unfortunately these things just take time and just joining length and generation length of, these animals means that yeah, we, , it just takes a while for all , the data to be captured.

Yeah. We're really hopeful that we'll find something interesting out of it, but equally , there will also be value if we find that we'll there's nothing that really stands out. 'cause that's also a finding as well. But my gut feeling is we'll find some measurement or group of measurements that will be worthwhile producers doing.

Because I think, , the big thing that Soph and I talked about in the initial phase of it was. If we can perform an [00:33:00] intervention on 2% of your sheep, so say you're running 2% rams say it's even 3%. If you can perform an in intervention on those animals, that has a significant effect on the number of lambs you're going to get.

That's on so many levels, like cost and logistics wise. That is. In this big country, we might get more people to do that than to scan their whole flock because you've gotta scan 98% of your animals if you're going to get into scanning. And please don't let anyone believe that. I don't think scanning is the single most important, dollar or whatever it is you could spend on your ewe in a year like that is really vital.

It just doesn't work in some of this bigger country. And if we can give producers, like some of our really extensive producers, a tool that they can use on 2% of their flock, which is the rams, to help 'em increase lambing percentages, I think that's a really valuable tool. But equally, , your producers who are, have really got the whole system dialed up.

, They're scanning [00:34:00] everything. Their nutrition's on point, their genetics is on point. For some of those guys, it'll just give them that extra one or 2% tweak. That , will make a difference for 'em. So , there's benefit for all parts of the, for every production system I believe in this work.

Kieran Smith: Yeah, absolutely. And yeah, it's a good point. You touched on yeah, focusing on the ram population , in your flock and. Yeah, often they seem to be , the animal that's very much overlooked , in a system and , in one back paddock or a holding paddock until it's yeah, comes around joining time and then, oh geez, we've gotta give these a bit of TLC sort of thing.

So been

Scott Parry: existing on a diet of galvanized bur and and rocks , for a while and yeah. Expected to you perform at their best.

Kieran Smith: Yeah, for sure. So, yeah, it might be , a friendly reminder to go and , , check on the fellas in the, in the back paddock and see how they're going.

So just a quick round the region, just wondering , if there's any other diseases or nutritional things at the moment within Western New South Wales that you've sort of seen with your, ear and nose to the ground that sort of people should be aware of or yeah, thinking about at the moment,

Scott Parry: Kieran, , I [00:35:00] think, having been in this western country now for well over 20 years, , I feel that we might be starting to roll into a bit of a drier patch, and let's hope my spidey senses are wrong. And let's hope. Even if they're right, it's not going to be, a really long, drawn out affair.

But I think yeah, , the rolling onset , of a dry time at the moment is probably the biggest thing I'm noticing. People looking to send stock on agistment, more cattle than sheep obviously, so I think , that's a trend that I'm seeing at the moment that isn't actually a disease trend, but you know, a smaller side to that that we touched on before was like, I got a call from , a LLS client who had found some agistment for 350 cattle and he said, oh look so excited. Really good paddock. This producer is in the far southwestern corner of Western and I said, oh, where is it?

And he said, oh, it's at Casino. And I went, oh, okay. That's great. But , I'd really like you to call a colleague of mine over on the north Coast. Josh Todd, who's one of the dvs in that North coast area, just heavy under Josh. Just see what animal health [00:36:00] issues there could be in sending cattle from the far west to that north coast area.

And yeah, they had a good yarn , , and suffice to say , they, , they decided not to go there because there are significant raft of biosecurity and animal health issues that will come about with sending cattle. And the same , could be said for sheep , from one. Extremely dry climates zone to a totally different coastal area. And we won't go deep into that, but , that's just something , I want producers out here to be aware of, like, just do your due diligence before you send stock on adjustment. Okay. And that's, it's not just , the potential disease issues, it's.

What are the facilities like? What's the fencing like? What's the water like, what's , the supervision going to be like? How far from you is it? How often are you gonna be able to get there? , Good adjustment is fantastic. Bad adjustment's a nightmare. So , that's probably a bit of a heads up. I'd like to give our producers other disease issues.

There was a bit of a flare up of anthrax, not in our region, but not far from it. Back, late last year and I just think as the season dries up. Maybe if there's [00:37:00] a bit of containment, feeding, if animals are feeding close to the ground just increases the chance of picking up some spores. , And so anthrax , is a potential issue that could arise and that will, you know, the way you'll be suspicious of that is just , a sudden group of unexplained deaths , in well.

Can actually occur in pigs, but for our sake of our argument, it'll be sheep or cattle. And quite often they'll have blood coming outta nostrils, anus, eye sockets, that type of thing. I think , that's , a potential issue that, we'll, that we're going to have to deal with depending. Depending on how long the dry season goes for and people's opportunity to feed, there's a whole raft of issues around supplementary feeding, such as grain poisoning.

You know, and, and if people start to get into feeding funky feeds, , like almond kernels and citrus waste and biscuit waste and. All these things., If the dry period lasts long enough, people start feeding weird stuff and any of those slightly odd sub feeding options come with a [00:38:00] raft of issues.

So, I think that's just, again, just something for producers to be aware of.

Kieran Smith: Yep. , , very good. you've already probably touched on my next question a little bit, might, , jag another piece of advice , out of you.

So you've already touched on uh, pregnancy scanning being a awesome tool for producers. , We've talked about bruso testing but what would be one piece of advice that you'd give a landholder to improve their productivity or profitability on their livestock enterprise? Whether that's sheep, cattle, or goats.

Scott Parry: probably the single bit of advice I would give is, keep it simple. And control the controllables. I think in this day and age where everyone's talking about ag tech and lots of bells and whistles, there can be a tendency for people to chase the sparkly product.

You know, whether it be a, a feed supplement or an injectable supplement or , a data management system, like, they're all important, don't get me wrong, but

some people will chase after that and not feed their animals properly or have really [00:39:00] ordinary waters and that sort of thing.

So I think do the simple things. , Get the nutrition right. Get your waters right, get your biosecurity right. And , and control, the controllable things , you know, and bruce has a classic example.

It's something we have the tools to control. So, yeah, I know. I prob I haven't given anyone a, a silver bullet or a magic wand there, but I would just remind producers of that don't roar into wanting to do a, a really flash artificial insemination program. If you're not feeding your animals properly to start with, or if you haven't gone on top of your bruce issue.

If you're not vaccinating for the right diseases that your animals are susceptible for, you know, keep it simple. Use the tools that are available to you to control the controllables. And once you've done that, then we might look at those one and two percenters, that can really tweak your system.

Kieran Smith: , That's great. , And final question for you on a bit of a lighter note, what's your favorite cut of lamb?

Scott Parry: rack of lamb.

Definitely. Very good. .

Kieran Smith: Keep it simple.

Scott Parry: Yeah, yeah. Keep it simple, but rack of [00:40:00] lamb or if you want to cut 'em up into cutlets you're just not doing that pesky, extra bit of bone there. Like I. I, I'm pretty big fo I think I can eat my body weight in rack of lamb or or lamb cutlets

Kieran Smith: Very good. thank you very much, Scott for jumping on the podcast and sharing some of your wisdom. In a, in. It's pretty easy to understand way. No, it's been good. I've never heard the term wedding tackle before, so that's new one for my repertoire.

Scott Parry: You can, you can borrow that one.

Kieran Smith: Yep. Oh, thank you. And yeah, if, if people are concerned about diseases yeah, potential health issues of , their livestock, what's , the best way to find the contact to their nearest vet.

Scott Parry: So ring any of your main offices like Broken Hill and Burke, Cobar Hillston just bang into the ever helpful Google and contact your nearest local LLS office.

Ask to speak to a district vet. If there's not one on the premises you'll be put in touch with one and, personally, like yeah, I'm happy to take calls anytime. I don't always answer them straight away, but I will always get back to you. And the same can be said for every vet that I work with out here.

Yeah, we're [00:41:00] always happy to talk to producers and there's no such thing as a silly question. But I may give you a silly answer from time to time.

Kieran Smith: Very good. , Thank you very much. Really appreciate your times.

Scott Parry: Pleasure, mate.

Kieran Smith: that's it for another episode of The Pastoral Potty. I hope you enjoyed the episode. You've probably noticed that some of our episodes are released at varying times. The best way to stay up to date with the latest episode is to hit the follow button on whatever podcast platform you're using.

The Pastoral Potty is brought to you by Western Local Land Services. This episode was recorded by me, Kieran Smith, and produced with the assistance of the team at Grow Love Media. Catch you next time [00:42:00]