

Guidelines for veterinarians issuing certificates on footrot status of flocks

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With the whole of New South Wales now gazetted as having either Control or Protected Area status for footrot, there is now less demand from industry for footrot certification at the flock level. A review of the Footrot Accredited Free Flock Scheme in 2002 indicated only limited industry support for the Scheme, and the NSW Footrot Steering Committee then elected to disband it. However, despite the decrease in footrot prevalence throughout NSW there will still be producers that, from time to time, will require veterinary certification of the footrot status of their flocks.

These guidelines have been prepared from the guidelines for the former Footrot Accredited Free Flock Scheme to help veterinarians inspecting sheep in the flock and issuing certificates.

Remember that a certificate does not provide a guarantee that the property is free of footrot. Instead, it is a statement that, on the basis of the inspections and examinations that have been carried out on a certain date, no evidence of virulent footrot has been detected in sheep or goats on the property. Certificates based on the examination of small numbers of sheep away from the flock are meaningless and should not be issued.

The guidelines are based on sample testing of a minimum number of sheep to give a 99% confidence level of detecting footrot in the flock at a disease prevalence of 1%. This should be stated on the certificate. The certificate should also state that, on the basis of an examination of sheep in the flock, there was no clinical evidence of virulent footrot infection on the property at a certain date. Selection of sheep and mobs to be examined should be biased toward those most likely to show signs of footrot.

Definitions used in the guidelines

A **mob** is defined as a group of sheep that have been running together through a period conducive to the spread of the disease. They may not be all running together at the time of the inspection.

A **flock** refers to all sheep on the property.

Inspection refers to an inspection of the property and mobs of sheep for evidence of lameness or other conditions. It does not refer to the examination of individual sheep.

Examination refers to the clinical examination of the feet of individual sheep in mobs on the property.

Virulent footrot is defined in the Written Instruments issued by the then NSW Agriculture (now NSW DPI) and State Council of Rural Lands Protection Boards as AI Circulars 2002/103 and 2002/104. Descriptions of the definition are provided in [Primefact 265 Footrot in sheep and goats](#).

Points to consider when assessing the footrot status of a property

You must consider the following points before you issue a certificate:

- history of the flock and evidence of suppressive treatments
- property biosecurity
- selecting sheep to inspect
- examining sheep on the property
- time of examination.

History of the flock

Inquire about any history of footrot on the property, including benign footrot, and ask whether the owner is aware of any footrot problems with sheep on neighbouring properties. Recent suppressive treatments, such as footbathing or paring, are likely



to affect the prevalence and the possibility of detecting infection.

Property biosecurity

You must be satisfied that the fencing (particularly boundary fences) is sheep-proof. Facilities must be adequate for the isolation of affected sheep and goats from other mobs of sheep and goats on the property. If you have doubts about neighbours or strays, then the property's level of biosecurity could determine whether you need to inspect individual mobs in more detail. There must be equipment to allow proper examination of sheep for evidence of infection.

Selecting sheep to inspect

Determine the size of the flock and the number of sheep and goats in individual mobs and age groups. Note all recent introductions into the flock. This should include rams, replacement ewes, sheep and goats brought in for fattening, agistment or any other reason and sheep returned to the property from shows, sales, agistment or for any other reason. Inspect all mobs of sheep and goats on the property in the paddock for any evidence of lameness (as a hands-off procedure). Target those mobs at greatest risk (as determined by the history of introductions, lameness and any other relevant conditions) for examination. Examine all lame sheep as a priority.

Examining sheep on the property

Determination of the numbers of sheep to be examined is based on a 99% confidence level of detecting footrot in the flock at a disease prevalence of 1%.

Target the following groups for examination:

- You must examine a sample of adult sheep and goats older than 3 years and use your professional judgement to select appropriate animals in this age group. Use the total number of sheep and goats over 3 years of age to determine the minimum number of animals to be examined (see Table 1). If, for example, 1000 animals older than 3 years are present in five mobs, then you must examine a minimum of 368 animals. You may either:
 - examine 74 from each mob, or
 - examine a sample from each of the mobs that have lame sheep or other relevant history, or
 - examine those mobs considered at greatest risk, for example, from infection from neighbouring flocks.

If the total number of sheep over 3 years of age is greater than 5000, then you should examine a

minimum of 438 sheep, sampled proportionally across all mobs.

- You should also examine a sample of sheep and goats under 12 months of age, as per Table 1. These are likely to be mobs formed by the aggregation of young sheep from several mobs of ewes on the property.
- Examine a proportion of sale rams if you consider that this is appropriate.

If you have any doubt, then examine additional sheep or goats in other mobs on the property. The numbers recommended for examination here are the minimum numbers required, and you have a right to examine additional animals on any certification examination.

Table 1: Number of sheep or goats to be examined (99% confidence level of detecting footrot in the flock at a disease prevalence of 1%)

No. of animals in flock	Minimum number to be examined
1-120	All
121-140	135
141-160	151
161-180	166
181-200	180
201-250	210
251-300	235
301-350	256
351-400	273
401-450	288
451-500	300
501-600	321
601-700	336
701-800	349
801-900	359
901-1000	368
1001-1200	381
1201-1400	391
1401-1600	399
1601-2000	410
2001-3000	438
More than 3000	438

Livestock Contractors approved under the Livestock Contractors Footrot Certification Scheme

may undertake clinical examination of sheep in the flock under the supervision of a veterinarian, but certificates must be issued by a veterinarian familiar with the flock. A copy of a certificate is provided on the next page. Owners should also provide a valid completed Footrot Vendor Declaration for sale sheep.

Time of examination of sheep

Mob inspection and examination of sheep are best carried out at least 6 to 8 weeks after the start of conditions that favour the spread of footrot on the property.

Be aware that in New South Wales virulent footrot is a notifiable disease. If footrot is diagnosed or suspected in a flock there is a legal requirement for you, the veterinarian, to notify an Inspector of Stock with the Rural Lands Protection Board or the Senior Regional Animal Health Manager of the district within 48 hours. You should also advise the owner that, once footrot is diagnosed, he or she has a legal responsibility to notify.

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (February 2007). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

Job number 7397

CERTIFICATE OF FOOTROT STATUS OF PROPERTY

I hereby certify that I have examined the sheep flock described below for the presence of footrot.

Owner's name and property address _____

Breed _____ Date/s of examination _____

Flock details

Class of flock (stud or commercial): _____

Description of sheep on property:

Mob	Age	Sex	No. in mob	Origin

Report on mobs examined

Mob	Description and no.	No. examined	Result

The sample size has been calculated at a 99% confidence level of detecting footrot in the flock at a disease prevalence of 1%.

On the basis of an examination of sheep in the flock on the dates specified, no clinical evidence of virulent footrot infection was found on the property.

Signed (veterinarian): _____

Address: _____

Date: _____

Attachments:

Laboratory tests to support the diagnosis of benign footrot, where identified.