



Department of
Primary Industries and
Regional Development

Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 4

Volume 5
Number 4 April, 1964


Article 3

1-1-1964

Starvation/mismothering : a major cause of lambing losses

Stanley M. Dennis

Follow this and additional works at: https://researchlibrary.agric.wa.gov.au/journal_agriculture4

 Part of the [Sheep and Goat Science Commons](#), [Veterinary Pathology and Pathobiology Commons](#), and the [Veterinary Preventive Medicine, Epidemiology, and Public Health Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dennis, Stanley M. (1964) "Starvation/mismothering : a major cause of lambing losses," *Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 4*: Vol. 5 : No. 4 , Article 3.
Available at: https://researchlibrary.agric.wa.gov.au/journal_agriculture4/vol5/iss4/3

This article is brought to you for free and open access by Research Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, Series 4* by an authorized administrator of Research Library. For more information, please contact jennifer.heathcote@agric.wa.gov.au, sandra.papenfus@agric.wa.gov.au, paul.orange@dpird.wa.gov.au.

Starvation/Mismothering

— a major cause of lambing losses

By S. M. DENNIS, B.V.Sc., Ph.D., Senior Veterinary Pathologist

RESULTS of the preliminary survey into the infectious causes of perinatal lamb mortalities carried out last year by the Department of Agriculture showed that starvation/mismothering was the most important single cause of death.

It was responsible for nearly half of the deaths that occurred during the first three days of life.

The second largest cause of neonatal death was weakness at birth and this group was responsible for a quarter of the losses. Together, starvation/mismothering and weakness at birth accounted for almost three-quarters of the lambs examined in this survey that died during the neonatal period—the first three days of life.

Environmental conditions and methods of management make it difficult to separate starvation and mismothering. Unless the ewes are under close observation so that evidence of satisfactory mothering behaviour may be ascertained—whether the lamb is a twin or not; or the ewe examined for signs of cut or blocked teats, no milk, or mastitis; signs of sickness and so on—then it is impossible to make a definite diagnosis of mismothering. In this survey no attempt was made to separate starvation from mismothering, both for the reasons listed above and because they are closely related and the effects of one can intensify the other. The two conditions were considered together as starvation/mismothering.

Starvation . . .

Lambs are born alive with substantial reserves of body fat and tissue fluids. Providing that the lamb is not suffering from any disease and is not subject to any lethal environmental stresses such as chilling, the lamb will remain alive for two or three days.

During this time the starving lamb is active, seeking its mother and trying to obtain milk from other ewes. Ultimately it may nibble at grass and may fill its stomach with grass and sand. The lamb

does not die until all the body fat reserves are completely used up, the normal whitish firm fatty tissue being reduced to soft, red, gelatinous tissue and the lamb is dehydrated. This is referred to as **uncomplicated starvation**.

In cases of **complicated starvation**, death has been accelerated either by infection, exposure or predators.

Starving Lambs Easy Prey

Lambs suffering from starvation/mismothering are easy prey for predators and the results of this survey suggested that they may be an important item of diet for foxes and crows in many areas. According to most of the farmers interviewed, 1963 appeared to be a particularly bad year for both foxes and crows. These predators, particularly crows, were ever on the look-out for a dead or dying lamb.

Climatic stresses were shown to accelerate pending neonatal deaths. A distinct causal relationship exists between starvation/mismothering on one hand and exposure on the other.

The predisposing causes of starvation/mismothering include neonatal weakness from any cause such as disease, prolonged birth, light or heavy lambs; multiple births; undernutrition of the ewe, particularly during the last six to eight weeks of pregnancy; faulty milk supply—may be due to no milk, thick milk, cut or blind teats or mastitis; sick or dead ewes; climatic conditions such as heat, cold, rain, wind, no shelter; management; accidents; congenital malformations.

What Can Be Done?

What can be done about these losses? First, it is essential to be aware of the causes and extent of these losses due to starvation and mismothering.

Second, to consider what steps you can take to reduce them.

Because of the large sheep breeding areas in the State, the different times of lambing and the existence or non-existence of clover disease on the properties it is not practical to make general recommendations. There are four measures, however, that are considered to be of value in reducing lamb wastage due to starvation and mismothering and these are:

- Check the udders after shearing or before mating.

- Ensure that pregnant ewes receive adequate feed particularly during the last six to eight weeks of pregnancy. This is important with autumn lambing.
- Lamb in a sheltered paddock or one containing plenty of shelter from trees, suckers, tussocks, and so on.
- Lamb ewes in short wool.

Your awareness of the enormous lamb wastage that occurs annually and your efforts to reduce these losses will help to overcome the present acute shortage of sheep in Western Australia.

SHEEP ABORTION SURVEY

THE Animal Health Laboratory of the Department of Agriculture plans to continue the survey commenced last year to determine the incidence of infectious abortion and perinatal lamb mortalities in sheep and to identify the micro-organisms responsible.

The results to date are encouraging and indicate that further investigations are required. Two diseases have been diagnosed for the first time as a result of the survey and another has been shown to be a cause of abortion in ewes as well as epididymitis in rams.

The success of this work depends on your co-operation in reporting promptly any abortions or suspected abortions, or increased perinatal lamb losses, to the nearest Department of Agriculture veterinary surgeon, agricultural adviser or stock inspector.

Without this co-operation, investigations of this nature are impossible.

Successful study of abortion outbreaks requires specimens of aborted lambs and placental membranes (afterbirth) in the freshest possible condition. The chances of making a diagnosis in an outbreak of abortion increase with the number of specimens examined, and the **fresher** they are the better.

If no Departmental officers are conveniently available we recommend that you forward the specimens by rail or bus, or better still, personally bring them directly to the Animal Health Laboratory at South Perth.

Warning.—As some of the agents which cause infectious abortion in sheep can be transmitted to man strict hygiene should be observed in handling affected animals or animal tissues.

ATTENTION FARMERS!

YOUR DISCOUNTS

News Flash

MANUFACTURERS ARE QUITTING MOWER STOCKS

62 gn. Rear Catcher Models 39 gns.

55 gn. Side Catcher Models 35 gns.

MOTHER'S DAY LINES:

| | | |
|--|----------|----------|
| Top Brand Juice Extractor | £23 9 6 | £16 19 6 |
| Ironing Board with Step Stool | £15 19 6 | £12 9 6 |
| Kerosene Heater | £15 19 6 | £11 10 8 |
| Carpet Squares, 12 ft. x 9 ft., sp/rubber backed | | £14 19 6 |
| Scatter Rugs, non-skid, 4 ft. x 27 in. | | £1 10 0 |
| 2 Brush Polisher, special | £19 19 0 | £14 19 6 |
| Electric Frypans: 11 inch | £13 19 6 | £9 19 6 |
| 12 inch | £16 9 6 | £11 17 0 |

DISCOUNTS given after trade-in: **TRADE-INS** reduce prices further.

20% off FURNITURE

| | | |
|---|-----------|-----------|
| Combination 'Robe: 5 ft. Maple, 6 drawers, mirror front, 3 ft. hanging space | £29 10 0 | £23 10 0 |
| Divan Bases discounted to | | £3 15 0 |
| Queen Anne Suite | £189 10 0 | £151 10 0 |
| Bedroom Suite, double | £79 0 0 | £59 19 0 |
| Bedroom Suite, single, 4 ft. sliding door robe, bookcase headunit, laminated drawer fronts | £49 10 0 | £39 19 0 |
| Rubber Mattresses, 3 ft. wide | £23 0 0 | £12 10 0 |
| 4 ft. 6 in. x 6 in. deep, reversible | £57 0 0 | £29 10 0 |
| Foam Rubber Pillows, damask covered | | 12 6 |

TERMS available on any purchase

Aerials for Country TV heavily discounted

TOP BRAND fringe area Television Sets, 189 gns. £124

Up to 50% off ELECTRICAL, extensive range

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|----------|
| RADIOGRAM, Top Reproduction | £208 19 0 | £145 0 0 |
| RECORD PLAYER | £29 8 0 | £23 10 6 |
| CAR RADIOS, 9 transistor | £40 19 0 | £27 10 0 |

(Car Batteries discounted 25%)

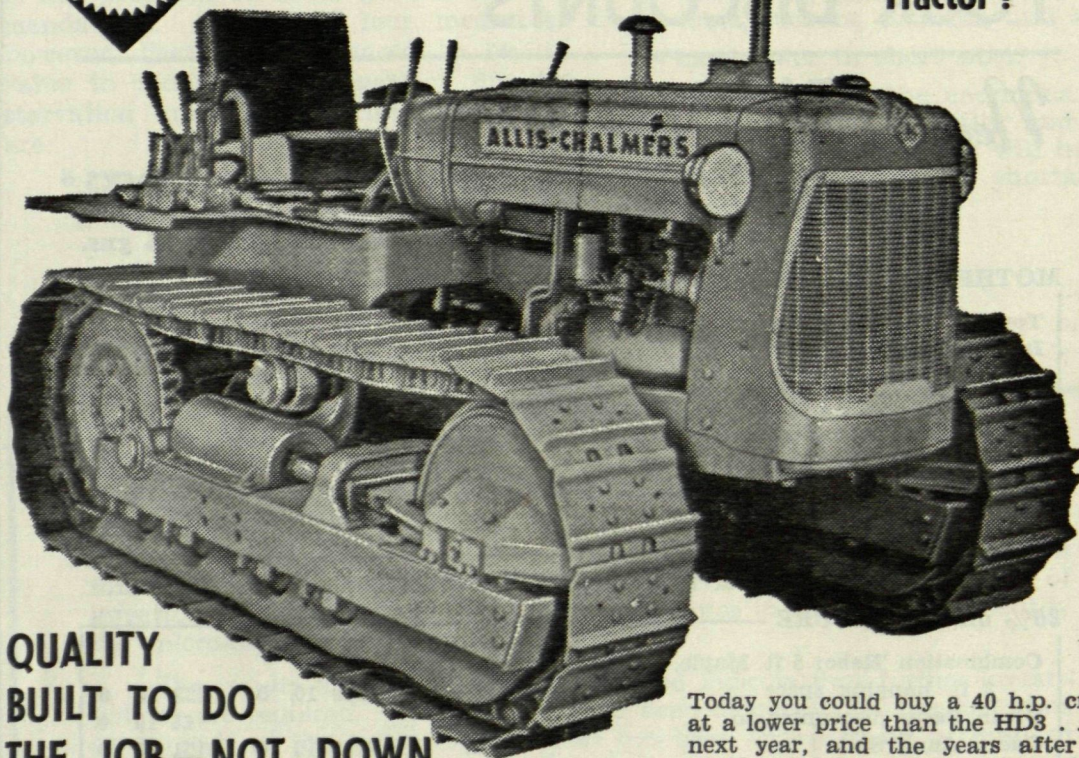
32 VOLT WASHING MACHINES, REFRIGERATORS, ETC.

CONTACT BOX 43, POST OFFICE, WEST PERTH.



HD-3

America's finest
40 h.p. Crawler
Tractor !



**QUALITY
BUILT TO DO
THE JOB—NOT DOWN
TO A PRICE—SO YOU KNOW
THE HD-3 WILL OUTWORK AND
OUTLAST EVERY COMPETITOR!**

**MAIL
COUPON
FOR
FULL
INFOR-
MATION**

WESFARMERS TUTT BRYANT PTY. LTD.
Railway Avenue, Bassendean, W.A.

Please send me, without obligation, more
information on the HD-3 Tractor.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

Today you could buy a 40 h.p. crawler at a lower price than the HD3 . . . but next year, and the years after that, you'd regret it. A tractor is an investment—and your HD3 will still be operating profitably long after others have become a liability. This is the security that the name ALLIS-CHALMERS gives you. Now look at some of HD3's terrific features.

- Solid 6 in. x 4 in. angle steel frame.
- Heavy duty track assembly.
- Shuttle clutch (forward to reverse without gearshift).
- Independent steering, clutches and brakes.
- Big capacity hydraulics.
- Straight dozer, A/dozer, loader, ripper, etc., available.

WESFARMERS TUTT BRYANT PTY. LTD. RAILWAY AVENUE, BASSENDEAN, W.A.
TELEPHONE 79 1616

Please mention the "Journal of Agriculture of W.A." when writing to advertisers