

## Q-Alpaca member feedback – Q & A

May 2009

The following comments in italics represent feedback from some Q-Alpaca participants on the program with responses below by Q-Alpaca Registrar, Dr Nicky Stone.

### **Comment 1**

*An increasing number of members are reporting concerns at the cost of post mortem and in some cases this expense is becoming a disincentive for members to join or continue. The purpose of Q-Alpaca PM is not to establish a cause of death but to rule out the existence of the specified conditions.*

### **Response:**

Q-Alpaca was established to enable producers to have a low risk JD status without the expense of faecal testing. Producers will need to decide which biosecurity program best suits their needs. It is unlikely Animal Health Committee (AHC) and Animal Health Australia (AHA) would permit a national JD status to be recorded if no examinations were performed.

Q-Alpaca sold itself to veterinarians and animal health jurisdictions on providing animals with low risk of JD and providing additional information on evidence for or against other endemic or exotic diseases. A firm diagnosis supports the claim that an animal does not have Johnes. Overseas auditors, if informed that 273 (for instance) animals have died, will ask why and will require proof that death was not from JD. An alternative diagnosis is not a requirement of Q-Alpaca but it supports the 'not JD' claim.

### **Comment 2**

*There is an increasing number of members expressing financial and logistical difficulties in meeting the requirement of adult Post Mortem of geriatric animals, whose primary cause of death is old age. With improved husbandry practices, an alpaca's lifespan in Australia can exceed 20 years. With the passage of time and a growing aged population of alpaca, the PM requirement of these aged animals will present a disincentive for members to join or continue with their participation of Q-Alpaca.*

### **Response**

Johnes Disease has a long incubation period, therefore it is more likely to be found in aged animals. An animal that is exposed to the JD bacteria as a cria or weaner may test negative for many years and only return a positive result in later life. In dairy cattle, where infection occurs in calves the age of the first test positive is commonly 6-8 years of age. Epidemiologically, older animals are the most important group of animals to test. The program would have no credibility if aged animals were excluded from the testing requirement.

### **Comment 3**

*AAA Ltd. has received Veterinarian feedback who report difficulties in performing post mortems where animals have died on weekends, most particularly in summer months.*

### **Response:**

This difficulty is recognised. Faecal culture could be considered in these cases.

### **Comment 4**

*As the number of alpaca in Australia increases and a relative decrease in their value is realised, industry is experiencing a growing number of breeders who slaughter for their table. At present the PM requirement presents difficulties in this area which will need to be addressed.*

### **Response:**

Animals destined for the table can be slaughtered at the time the vet visits to perform PM. The vet will mainly be examining internal organs, not the skeletal muscle required for the table. Luckily the two parties require different parts of the beast. If multiple animals are slaughtered e.g. consignments to abattoirs, I agree that Q-Alpaca would not be a suitable program given its PM requirement.

If it becomes widespread to cull males ( ? aged less than 2 years), and multiple animals are slaughtered e.g. consignments to abattoirs for meat, adaptations to this program will need to be considered.

**Dr Nicky Stone**

Q-Alpaca Registrar

**Post Script:**

In relation to Comment 4 and Response – Animals slaughtered for table. When Q-Alpaca was first developed, slaughter for table by breeders was a rare occurrence. As it appears this practice is becoming more commonplace, AHH&W is currently investigating means in which this facility can be included in the Q-Alpaca program without the requirement of Post Mortem.

**AHH&W Committee**