

Raising sheep: understanding Scrapies

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1. What is Scrapie?
 - a. Scrapie is a fatal, degenerative disease affecting the central nervous system of sheep and goats. There is no cure or treatment for this disease.
2. How did Scrapie get its name?
 - a. Individual sheep or goats that have Scrapie will often rub on objects and scrape off their wool or hair.
3. How widespread is Scrapie in the USA?
 - a. It is not a common problem. Since it was first found in 1947, about 1600 sheep and goats have been diagnosed with Scrapie and only 7 cases have been found in goats in the past 10 years.
4. What causes Scrapie?
 - a. An agent that is smaller than a virus. It is either a protein called a prion or it is another substance closely associated with the prion protein. Scientists are still learning about the Scrapie agent and exactly how it works. It is known that the Scrapie agent is extremely resistant to heat and to normal sterilization processes. It eventually attacks the brain, leaving holes in it much like swiss cheese or a sponge, giving it the name spongiform encephalopathy.

5. Does the Scrapie eradication program provide indemnity to producers?
 - a. Yes, producers whose flocks or herds are infected with Scrapie will be eligible for reimbursement for animals that are depopulated.
6. Will producers have other assistance if their flocks or herds are infected?
 - a. Yes, both the state and federal government animal health authorities will help the producer develop a plan to control and eliminate the disease.

Clinical signs of Scrapie:

- Weight loss despite retention of appetite
- Behavioral changes
- Itching and rubbing
- Wool pulling
- Biting at legs and side
- Lip smacking
- Loss of coordination
- Increased sensitivity to noise and movement
- High-stepping gait of forelimbs
- Bunny-hop movement of rear
- Swaying of back end
- Tremor
- Down, unable to stand
- Death

Clinical signs can be confused with other ailments like pregnancy toxemia, lice, brain abscess, OPP, etc. the only way to be sure is to have animal tested by your veterinarian.