



Footrot in Sheep: 4. Prevention and Damage Control

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Footrot! How can I keep it out? What can I do if my flock gets it?

These questions haunt every conscientious sheep owner. Prevention is better than cure, especially in the case of footrot. Footrot is that dreaded disease that we can all live without.

If you buy sheep, even just a few rams, you are at risk of introducing footrot to your clean flocks. If you have neighbours, a road adjoining your property or a bush block next door, your sheep are at risk of contracting footrot from straying sheep or wandering goats.

Introduced sheep are without question the most common cause of footrot outbreaks. "Let the buyer beware" is the warning to bear in mind when purchasing sheep. Since footrot will be your problem, you should personally ensure that sheep are clean before you buy them.

Footrot prevention and damage control

Check list ■ ■ ■

In most cases footrot is a preventable disease. Footrot is virtually always carried into a property and flock by a sheep or goat.

Source	Prevention
Purchase	■ Examine feet before buying, look for lameness and signs of treatment, check again at home then footbath, isolate until sheep go through spring with no sign of footrot.
Road	■ Check fences, don't use road for 7 days after other sheep, footbath after use if risk, stop sheep straying.
Stray from neighbours	■ Check fences, catch and examine strays promptly, footbath and isolate infected mob if risk.
Stray in neighbours	■ Ask neighbour not to return over fence, collect, check and footbath the stray, fix fences.
Truck or saleyard	■ Use clean truck, footbath on arrival, isolate until sheep go through spring with no sign of footrot.

PREVENTION is by thorough examination, footbathing and movement control.

DAMAGE CONTROL is minimising the effect by isolation and checking all new sheep until removed or sheep go through spring with no sign of footrot.

Introducing an infected sheep or mob is bad enough, but to allow it to spread footrot to others or all mobs is disaster. Treat all new and stray sheep as risks, keep them isolated, handle and visit them last and watch them carefully.

Footrot prevention and damage control

Best practice ★★★★★

Buying Sheep

★ Source - A purchase direct from the breeder's property is usually safer than buying from saleyards.

★ Vendor Declaration - Request the vendor supply a declaration that the sheep and property are free of virulent footrot. Vendor declarations are a formal, industry-recognised method of providing a safe way to buy and sell. They reduce the risk of buying virulent footrot and allow the purchaser to return sheep (with full refund of purchase and transport costs) if they are confirmed infected with virulent footrot within 14 days. A Vendor Declaration form is appended to this Agriculture Note. They are also available from DPI offices and from stock agents.

★ Observe - On arrival at the vendor's property, look around for signs of footrot treatment, a recently used footbath, "Formalin" containers or zinc sulphate bags or even a pile of hoof clippings.

★ Overview - Whether in a saleyard or on a farm, first take an overview of the mob. Are there any "ring-ins" or strays that don't fit the mob, or sheep that are in poorer condition than the rest? Give these types of sheep a close examination.

★ Examine - Allow sheep to drift quietly past while you look for any lameness or reluctance to walk. A sheep that prefers to sit, limps or eases the weight on a foot is a prime suspect that should be tipped up and examined, foot by foot.

Get in amongst the sheep and tip a number up, examine their feet for any signs of footrot or for signs of paring or footbathing. Look for redness or scalding between the claws,

lifting and separation of horn on inside of the hoof or any unacceptable foot deformity.

A recent footbath may have dried the moisture out, but the bare pink or scaly skin will still be evident in early cases.

★ **Beware** - Remember that an unscrupulous person selling sheep from a "foot-rotty" flock will have drafted out the lame sheep. When you see the sale mob, you will have to pick the one or two that may have been missed; they may be your only clue. Tight penning or running sheep are means of hiding lameness.

★ **Saleyards** - Animal Health Officers in Victoria attend most store sales and they detected many footrot affected sheep in saleyards. While their presence is a deterrent to the unscrupulous vendor, obviously they cannot guarantee that every sheep is free of footrot. If you have examined the sheep you wish to buy and are unsure about some feet, ask the Animal Health Officer at the sale to check them with you.

★ **Satisfied** - Having satisfied yourself that the sheep are clean and that you have confidence in the state of their feet, then conclude the purchase.

★ **Trucking** - Select a reputable carrier with a clean truck to take them home. Question the carrier about his recent loads of sheep and insist the truck is washed out before loading your sheep.

★ **Taking Delivery** - On arrival at your sheep yards, take time to check the sheep again, looking for "ring-ins" or lameness that weren't apparent before. A footbath in zinc sulphate will destroy any bacteria that may have been picked up during yarding or transport. This footbath adds another string to your bow of protection. This is your last chance to pick up footrot before releasing it onto your property.

★ **Isolation and checking** - Your newly-acquired sheep should be isolated as a separate mob for as long as possible. Regularly inspect them and investigate any signs of lameness. Always yard, handle and visit them last to avoid transferring undetected infection to your clean mobs.

New sheep can be considered free of footrot when they have passed through a suitable spread period, such as spring, without treatment or signs of footrot. They can then be safely integrated with other mobs.

If at any stage you are unsure about a foot condition or you suspect footrot, contact your veterinarian or Animal Health Officer. Their experience will provide an accurate diagnosis.

Strays

★ Stray sheep and goats are the other major means of introducing footrot to your property. Protect your flocks by ensuring that boundary fences are as secure as possible.

Sheep droving along road reserves, neighbours' sheep and wandering stock all pose a risk.

When stray sheep are found in your flock, catch them at first sighting and examine them carefully before returning them.

Ask your neighbours to let you know if they find any of your sheep in their flocks or on roads. A wandering sheep put back over the fence may be the one to introduce footrot to your property. Collect the wanderer from the neighbour's farm, raddle it and thoroughly examine it before returning it to the mob. If you have any doubts, footbath the offender and keep it in isolation until you are satisfied that it is not a risk.

Roads

★ Roads used by other sheep may remain infected for up to 7 days. Drovers, neighbours, other farmers and strays may use your road. Be aware of who has been around and look for signs of other sheep travelling your route. A footbath on arrival will eliminate most of the risk if road use was unavoidable. Trucking sheep between properties is a safer option if neighbouring properties or other users are suspected of having footrot.

Beware and take care

★ The history of most footrot outbreaks shows that a little care could have prevented the infection coming onto the property in the first place. Beware and take care is the best advice.

If you are ever unfortunate enough to experience an outbreak of footrot in your sheep, all is not lost. You have options available to combat, control and cure footrot. Complete eradication of footrot is possible and practical, but prevention is even better.

Further information

Footrot in Sheep - Agriculture Notes from DPI offices -

AG0445: *Footrot in sheep:1. Disease facts*

AG0446: *Footrot in sheep:2. Diagnosis*

AG0447: *Footrot in sheep:3. Treatment*

AG0448: *Footrot in sheep:4. Prevention and damage control*

AG0190: *Footrot in sheep:5. Benign footrot*

Beating Footrot - 39 pages, including colour photos, available from DPI offices.

Footrot the Facts - Video all about footrot, available on loan from DPI offices.

The previous version of this note was published in March 2007.

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VENDOR DECLARATION - FOOTROT

(STOCK AGENTS MUST NOT MAKE THIS DECLARATION ON BEHALF OF CLIENTS)

I _____ of _____

(Full name) (Address)

am the owner/authorised representative* of the owner of the sheen detailed below. (*delete one)

Number of Sheep	Description (age, sex, breed)	Earmarks, brands, identification eg. eartags, tattoos

These sheep have been kept on (property/owners name) _____

at (postal address) _____

These sheep left (or will leave) this property on (date) ____/____/____

I DECLARE THAT THE SHEEP LISTED ABOVE:

1. have been examined by me (or under my supervision) within the previous 7 days and no signs of footrot were observed (checked for lame sheep and all feet of any lame sheep examined);
2. were either (*delete where not applicable):
 - I. bred on the property and/or*
 - II. introduced onto the property with a signed Vendor Declaration form (copy to be provided on request) and/or*
 - III. have been an the property for more than two years*;
3. come from a property where to the best of my knowledge all sheep have within the previous 12 months been free of virulent footrot:
4. have not been vaccinated with, a footrot vaccine within the previous 12 months

AND I AGREE THAT:-

if within 14 days of leaving this property these sheep are examined by a veterinarian and,

- I. a diagnosis of virulent footrot is made (according to the approved guidelines) or virulent footrot is suspected and later confirmed and
- II. in the opinion of the veterinarian this infection was present prior to this 14 day period an
- III. a veterinary certificate acknowledging the above is provided to the purchaser and,
- IV. all parties were notified when footrot was initially suspected;

then I agree that this sale will be null and void and that

- I will remove these sheep from the purchaser's property within 7 days of the confirmed diagnosis;
- I will pay all transport costs of these sheep to and from the purchaser's property,;
- Where payment for these sheep has been made I will refund the purchase price in full.

DECLARED at _____ date _____

SIGNED _____