

RSPCA Australia Scholarship for Humane Animal Production Research – Annual Report 2009-10

Humane Animal Production Scholar 2008: Aprille Chadwick, University of Western Australia

Project title: Producer attitudes towards animal welfare and the adoption of least stressful reproductive technologies in goats.

Progress report 2009-10

Project description

In production animal farming, at particular times of intensive management, such as artificial insemination (AI) during the breeding season, a certain amount of pain and distress is unavoidable. The key is to minimize the stress imposed on our production animals. However, identifying more 'ethical' farm management procedures is only the first step towards improving animal welfare at the farm level. Ultimately, the improvement will only be seen when producers adopt these more 'ethical' management procedures and ideally it would be better for producers to adopt these procedures voluntarily as opposed to any form of legislation. Voluntary adoption by goat producer's of more "animal friendly" practices can be improved by targeting the major factors that drive their decision making process. These factors can be highlighted by understanding their attitudes towards animal welfare and specifically the adoption or non-adoption of least stressful AI practices. The utilisation of this information will assist in the improvement of animal welfare on-farm; the specific aim of this project.

Progress to date

This RSPCA funded project plus my previous research was sufficient to upgrade my Masters to a PhD. My PhD was formally approved by UWA, Graduate Research School in October 2009.

A review of literature was completed and the survey instrument was constructed. The survey instrument required approval from UWA, Human Research Ethics Committee and approval was granted December, 2009 (RA4/1/2632).

To ensure the survey was well understood a pilot study was sent out to 10 goat producers. Once all responses were received, the feedback was noted and any changes to improve the clarity and efficiency of the survey were made. The survey was completed and contact with Australian Goat Producer Associations and Industry bodies was made. Support for the distribution of the survey to members was difficult and in the end support was limited. The survey was launched online via SurveyGizmo, making it easy for producers to participate. Producers were given approximately 4 weeks to respond. Response was very slow but allowed for a preliminary analysis of the data. It was decided that some minor changes were required to tease out more information of the producers' decision making process regarding artificial insemination. The survey was launched again but this time producers were contacted via public listings and advertisements placed on 'Online livestock'. Participants were given 4 weeks to respond and the response rate using direct contact proved more successful. Preliminary analysis

has been conducted and the combination of both data sets is promising but is still too early to draw conclusions from these preliminary results.

Respondents, so far, have been goat producers (fibre, dairy and meat) but ideally harvesters of feral goats also need to be surveyed. In an attempt to capture farmers harvesting goats, a second survey has been formulated using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Producers that harvest goats do not use artificial insemination and consequently, from an Industry standpoint they felt it was not in their interest to support the first survey. Therefore, we decided to develop a second survey targeting the adoption of 'low stress' stock handling. We chose handling because it is a practice that cannot be avoided in any animal industry. It is particularly important for feral animals because of no previous exposure to handling. The TPB predicts specific behaviours (in this case low stress stock handling of goats) by measuring ones' intention, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (PBC) of the behaviour in question. Information gathered from this survey may help in designing an intervention that will improve the adoption of low stress stock handling techniques for goats.

Due to the lack of support from industry for the first survey and the addition of a second survey, the date for completion of some tasks has been delayed.

Future timeline 2010/2011

Work	Task to be Completed	Date for Completion
Additional Survey (2)	Low stress stock handling Completed 50%	November 2010
Analysis of survey (1)	Completed 50%	November 2010
Analysis of survey (2)	Analysis and validation of survey (2) data	February 2011
Journal Article	Draft copy to supervisors for revision – “Attitudes of goat producer’s towards animal welfare and the adoption of least stressful artificial insemination methods”.	February 2011 (delayed)
Seminar	Animal Biology, final oral presentation	February 2011
Thesis	Final version and submission	May 2011