

Alpaca Alert – Facial Eczema conditions are perfect this wet February & March.

This is a major health Issue for Autumn in our Region of the South Coast & Highlands and, further south on the coastal plain, the Hawkesbury Basin and the Goulburn Districts, especially following rains.

A serious and often fatal condition which attacks the liver of our alpacas is called Facial Eczema. It is caused by a microscopic fungus which releases a lethal toxin. Like mushrooms, it is particularly prevalent following rain in the warm, humid late summer temperatures of NSW. Consequently the vets see frequently cases at this time of year when there is warm soils, lush grasses and humidity in the air. *The worst case grasses to feed your alpacas right now is anything that may have any dead matter in it or at the base of your new green grasses. ie dead grass clippings, slashed or mulched paddocks, old hay, rye grass which has died off over summer with new shoots growing up through the middle of the plant, etc.* Spores that have grown in the dead matter, can adhere to the new shoots as they grow up through it.

Sheep, deer and alpacas are highly sensitive to the spores produced by this fungus. Don't let sheep breeders tell you sheep aren't, for the sake of their sheep.

Dullness, lack of appetite, jaundice, seeking shade, rubbing ears, eyes and face are some of the symptoms. Usually, by the time there is weight loss or dry, rough, swollen or simply hairless skin around eyes, ears, anus etc, your alpaca has been already pretty ill.

Best treatment, if you suspect your animals are not faring well, is to immediately move stock out of the paddock onto supplementary dry clean Lucerne hay and call the vet. Stop access to that pasture totally until winter temperatures in May ensure no further spores are adhering to your pastures.

Best preventative is to be on the alert and assess your paddocks for that dead grass matter.

Additionally Bill Beresford our vet, (reachable at his clinic in Moss Vale on 48681310) suggests feeding Zinc (Zinc methionine is the best) at the rate of about 2g per alpaca per day. This can help to protect the liver from the effects of the toxin. It is only preventative though, not curative.

If you are concerned feel free to contact Neil Parker or Janie Hicks at Coolaroo for additional information. If you collect a sample of the grasses in your suspect paddock, send it to PO Box 751, Mittagong, we will carry out the testing necessary to identify the spores but ring us first for instructions as to the collection procedure. Neil: 0428 771 264 or Janie: 02 48785 266.

Happy life, Happy Alpaca.....