

Farmers warned to be careful when buying-in animals

The Ruminant Veterinary Association of South Africa has issued a warning against 'bargain buys' that could result in farmers introducing new diseases onto their farms.

This warning accompanied the association's latest disease report, and specifically referred to the dangers of Ovine Johne's Disease (OJD), also known as paratuberculosis.

Prof Gareth Bath, an emeritus professor of smallstock, health and production at the University of Pretoria, said that OJD was currently one of the greatest sheep disease concerns in South Africa, with cases detected in the Free State and Eastern Cape.

"The problem with OJD is that it might take years to detect. While virtually all animals are

infected in the first months of life, signs of the disease usually only appear when animals are older.

"The disease causes animals to lose weight, especially during stressful times. There might also be symptoms of intermittent diarrhoea, which might be mistaken for worm infestation," Bath said.

OJD could result in an annual mortality rate of 10% or more, and once the disease had infected a flock, it was almost impossible to eradicate.

Bath said that OJD was usually transmitted through the faeces of infected animals, and could be transmitted *in utero* or through milk.

"A farmer would have to remove all his sheep from the farm for at least two years if he wanted to get

rid of the disease, which doesn't make economic sense," he said.

While vaccinations were highly efficient in treating and preventing the disease, only farms that had tested positive for OJD were allowed to utilise them. Vaccinated animals from farms that had tested positive for the disease could also only be sold to other farms that had tested positive.

While eliminating the risk of buying-in OJD infected sheep was difficult, farmers could reduce these risks by making use of the OJD vendor declaration. "The declaration asks sheep vendors questions concerning farm management policies and OJD, which should help buyers make [more] informed decisions," Bath said. — *Glennis Kriel*