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## **COVID-19 meat processing protocol and feed implications for farmers**

### ***The following is a joint update from B+LNZ and the Meat Industry Association***

New protocols that processing companies have to follow in order to operate during the COVID-19 lockdown will impact on processing capacity. The following update explains the background to the situation and advice for farmers on what they can do to manage the potential impact given feed shortages across the country.

#### *New COVID-19 meat processing protocol*

A strict set of rules and requirements to ensure the processing and export sector's continuing operations do not compromise people's safety or contribute to the spread of COVID-19 has now been released by the Meat Industry Association (MIA) after consultation with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI).

To keep employees safe, the sector has introduced new ways of working at plants across the country. The comprehensive schedule of requirements include physical distancing, personal hygiene, transport to and from work, further increased cleaning/disinfection of processing areas and the use of Personal Protective Equipment.

There has been close consultation between processing and exporting companies, their people and the Meat Workers Union in the development of the protocol.

The new operating procedures will have significant implications for farmers through an unavoidable reduction in processing capacity across the industry, and farmers are likely to face delays in getting their livestock processed.

Dairy, sheep and beef farmers have already dealt with earlier delays brought about by COVID-19-related market disruption, combined with the widespread drought that has brought large numbers of stock forward for processing earlier than would normally be the case.

The reduction in processing capacity is going to exacerbate this situation further. There are also potential feed issues developing in the South Island with low winter cropping yields following the recent flooding.

#### *What farmers can do*

**For those farmers likely to be affected, our advice is to act now. The following is a checklist, collated from our resources and industry experts, to consider:**

1. Get an accurate tally of how many stock you wish to have processed, and by when.
2. Talk to your meat company representative to find out what's changed and identify the implications for you – how many animals delayed and for how long. Let them know your processing needs.
3. Complete a Feed Budget from now until Spring, based on likely processing dates (B+LNZ has spreadsheets, worksheets and feed budget software to help, or your trusted advisor can assist):

- Look at your feed situation do a stocktake of pasture cover plus readily available supplements and forage crops
- What's my pasture going to grow over the next while?
- What will be the pasture growth response to fertiliser N (urea, DAP and the like) and how quickly can I get it on?
- What's my feed demand going to be and what's the additional demand with those extra mouths I'm going to have to carry? Slot all of these figures into a feed budget
- What's that mean for my ongoing feed cover, my seasonal pasture cover targets and animal production targets?

4. If there's a feed deficit what are my options:

- For ewes, cows, finishing stock, trading stock, young stock
- If one class of stock is unable to be processed, are there other stock classes you could and should consider processing instead, or is the store market an option?
- Should I defer planned hogget mating?
- Use a ram harness to draft off mated ewes as early as possible onto maintenance feed
- Nitrogen – temperature, moisture, feed cover – what response will I get?
- Other supplements; barley, baleage, PKE. Consider price, availability, equipment, utilisation, labour
- Grazing out – what stock class, where, what performance arrangements

5. Look at the cashflow consequences and talk to your financial advisors and your financiers as early as possible.

6. Keep an eye on yourself and your neighbours talk about the issues over the fence (with appropriate distancing) or on the phone and don't hesitate to reach out to your other trusted advisors.

7. Consider a 'virtual discussion group' or 'virtual woolshed meeting' – use tools like Skype or Zoom to have a discussion with other farmers. A problem shared is a problem halved.

8. If you want to talk to someone, confidentially, about your situation or the situation of someone you are concerned about, contact Rural Support Trust.

9. Ensure that you have good on-farm COVID-19 risk management processes which will ensure the safety of your own people and those essential services you work with.

10. Recognise that given the current COVID-19 restrictions across the industry things will take longer so acting early is critical.

You can find this checklist and other key feed resources here: <https://beeflambnz.com/news-views/covid-19-feed-management-check-list-farmers>

B+LNZ is currently working with MPI and other agricultural organisations to set up a nationwide system where farmers can ring up to get help to determine how much feed they have, and identify options for managing the situation. This system is expected to be launched later this week.

B+LNZ is also holding a weekly drought drop in phonecall, where we will have a different expert each week providing advice on managing the dry. You can register here:

<https://beeflambnz.com/events/blnz-conference-call-weekly-drought-drop-%E2%80%93-2-april>

This is going to be a challenging situation for many farmers. Beef + Lamb New Zealand and the Meat Industry Association will continue to work on your behalf to:

- Maximise processing capacity without compromising worker safety;
- Deliver you industry overview information and market intelligence that can help you to plan ahead; and
- Provide practical tools and information and access to expertise that can help you to make the best decisions for your business.

For more general advice for farmers on managing their farm under the COVID-19 lockdown, please visit the B+LNZ dedicated COVID website page: <https://beeflambnz.com/news-views/coronavirus-covid-19>.



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