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**SPECIFICITY OF A HAND-HELD
IMMUNOCHROMATOGRAPHIC ASSAY
FOR ANTHRAX IN CATTLE**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment (50%) of the
requirements for the degree of**

MASTER OF VETERINARY STUDIES

IN

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

**At Massey University, Turitea campus,
Palmerston North,
New Zealand.**

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FEBRUARY 2002**

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the hand-held immunochromatographic assay was a reliable method for field based diagnosis of anthrax. This study was designed and conducted with an emphasis on obtaining an estimate of performance accuracy, in terms of specificity for the protective antigen (PA) component of the anthrax toxin. To examine specificity the hand-held assay had to be assessed under similar circumstances to that experienced in the field from typical animals in which anthrax may be suspected.

To achieve this, blood samples were collected post-mortem from 240 cattle at the Stanhope and Camperdown knackeries in Victoria. Blood smears were prepared, hand-held assays were performed on-site and a sample of blood transported back to the laboratory for bacterial culture. All 240 samples gave negative results in the hand-held assay and *B. anthracis* was not detected in any sample by culture or blood smear, which were considered the definitive diagnostic tests. Thus the hand-held assay was regarded as 100% specific (98.5-100%; 95% CI) for these cattle examined in Victoria.

The purpose of the second study was to determine whether the live Sterne strain 34F₂ vaccine for anthrax would result in false positives arising in the hand-held assay in cattle recently vaccinated. Ten cattle were vaccinated with the 34F₂ vaccine and monitored for 15 days. No PA was detected in the blood of vaccinated cattle in the hand-held assay or on culture within this time. These results show that the hand-held assay does not give false positive test

results in cattle post-vaccination with live 34F₂ *B. anthracis* vaccine. The hand-held assay can be used with confidence on samples from recently vaccinated cattle that have died when it is necessary to know whether they had succumbed to anthrax or not.

The hand-held assay has the potential to be adopted as a routine test for the preliminary assessment of sudden death in cattle. The simplicity of the assay enables it to be used by unskilled lay people, which means that it could be used by knackery workers for surveillance in areas with a previous history of disease or by veterinarians as a preliminary routine tool in investigating sudden death in cattle. However the study described in this thesis only assesses the specificity of the assay and a further study, involving a similar number of cattle affected with anthrax, needs to be conducted to assess the sensitivity of the assay.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to extend sincere gratitude to all who have assisted and supported me throughout my Masters.

Professor Colin Wilks my supervisor, for his unfailing support, friendship, encouragement, guidance and excellent counsel over the years.

Massey University and Dr John Lumsden for his consultancy throughout the course of my studies.

The United States Naval Medical Research Center; Captain Mateczun, Dr Robert Bull and Dr Anne Peruski for the supply of the hand-held immunochromatographic assays under investigation.

The Victorian Institute of Animal Science, my colleagues and in particular Dr Catherine Ainsworth for allowing me the opportunity to complete my Masters and her support throughout this study.

Dr Robin Condron for his scientific advice and assistance.

Kim O'Riley for her technical assistance, friendship and support through all of the fragrant, aesthetically challenging jobs that we had to perform! A true champion.

Peter Langdon for supplying us with cattle to undertake the vaccination trial and for his calm manner in stressful situations that was always well appreciated. Dr Noel Campbell for his veterinary assistance with the vaccination program.

Brian and Tom from Aulds Knackery at Stanhope and Rowley and Steve from "Jacka the Knacker" at Camperdown, for assisting with the collection of blood samples for the specificity trials.

Dr Tracey Bradley for her knowledge in anthrax, literary skills, excellent advice and friendship.

Dr Irene Peroulis for her scientific advice, friendship, encouragement and support throughout my study.

My beloved Dr Kluver! for his patience, love, support, belief in my abilities and encouragement to do great things. Not to mention his epidemiological input and advice.

My family for having faith in me.

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my parents Gordon and Jeanie, my sister Barbie and Patrick Kluver for their unfailing love, support and encouragement.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>B. anthracis</i>	<i>Bacillus anthracis</i>
<i>B. mycooides</i>	<i>Bacillus mycooides</i>
cfu	colony forming units
CI	confidence interval
cm	centimetre
CO₂	carbon dioxide
°C	degree celcius
D+	disease present
D-	disease absent
EDTA	ethylenediamine tetraacetic acid
EF	oedema factor
ELISA	Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay
ELLA	Enzyme-Linked Lectinosorbent Assay
ET	oedema toxin
FP	false positive
g	gram
h	hour
IgG	Immunoglobulin G
IHA	indirect haemagglutination assay
kDa	kilodalton
km	kilometre
LF	lethal factor
LT	lethal toxin

mm	millimetre
mL	millilitre
ng	nanogram
NPV	Negative predictive value
P	pretest probability
PA	Protective antigen
PCR	Polymerase chain reaction
PLET	polymyxin-lysozyme-EDTA-thallos acetate
PPV	Positive predictive value
rpm	revolutions per minute
s	seconds
SBA	sheep blood agar
<i>Se</i>	sensitivity
<i>Sp</i>	specificity
T+	test positive
T-	test negative
TN	true negative
TNF	tumour necrosis factor
TP	true positive
%	percent
µg	microgram
µm	micrometre