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Studies On The Vaccination Of Sheep
Against Brucella ovis Infection

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ABSTRACT

A study was made of the efficacy and adverse effects of an inactivated Brucella ovis saline-in-oil vaccine administered either once or twice by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal route.

Seven Brucella ovis isolates from various sources, including the two used in the manufacture of the Brucella ovis vaccine, were subjected to Bacterial Restriction Endonuclease Analysis and no genetic differences were found. It was concluded that there is probably only one strain of the organism.

It was found that rams vaccinated by the subcutaneous route in the neck invariably developed a palpable inflammatory lesion at the site of injection. The lesions had a mean diameter of approximately 3cm, about one-third of them discharged, and the majority persisted for at least one year after vaccination. These lesions were chronic granulomatous inflammatory reactions arranged around droplets of the oily Brucella ovis vaccine.

The intraperitoneal route of vaccination has been advocated in the past as a way of avoiding visible lesions. Necropsy of vaccinated animals revealed that in over 50% of cases, at least some of the vaccine administered by this technique failed to reach the cavity and was deposited either beneath the parietal peritoneum or between the muscles of the abdominal wall. Regardless of the site of deposition, however, the vaccine always provoked a chronic granulomatous inflammation of the tissues with which it came into contact. Changing from a subcutaneous to an intraperitoneal vaccination technique merely moved the reaction to a site where it was less visible.

Serological studies using the Brucella ovis complement fixation test, gel diffusion test and enzyme linked immunosorbent assay demonstrated a consistent difference in the antibody response of rams vaccinated by the subcutaneous technique in comparison with those vaccinated by the intraperitoneal technique. Those vaccinated by the

subcutaneous route generally developed antibody titres more rapidly and often had higher peak titres.

In the same way, animals vaccinated twice by either route generally had greater and more persistent antibody titres than those vaccinated once by the same method.

The differences in the serological response of rams to different vaccination techniques were reflected by similar differences in resistance to experimental infection. The administration of an inactivated Brucella ovis saline-in-oil vaccine by any of the techniques studied significantly increased resistance to challenge by the intravenous route. However, two spaced doses of vaccine appeared to be more effective than a single dose, and the subcutaneous technique appeared to be more effective than the intraperitoneal method.

Using intravenous inoculation, the number of bacteria required to infect 50% of unvaccinated animals was estimated to be 9.5×10^4 organisms. The administration of a single dose of vaccine by the intraperitoneal technique raised that figure to approximately 6.7×10^6 , and the administration of two doses of vaccine by the subcutaneous route raised it to approximately 6.8×10^7 .

A viable count of the number of Brucella ovis bacteria present in the semen of an infected ram showed that at least 3×10^9 organisms could be excreted in a single ejaculate. This was over 31,000 times the number required to infect 50% of unvaccinated rams after intravenous inoculation and 44 times that required to infect 50% of animals vaccinated twice by the subcutaneous route. There is therefore a real possibility that natural challenge through homosexual activity may result in the infection of even vaccinated rams.

It was concluded that if vaccination is to be used as a means of controlling the spread of ovine brucellosis, a programme of two doses of vaccine administered at an interval of at least four weeks should be employed. The second dose of vaccine should be administered at least four weeks before the anticipated period of risk. If this method of control is adopted, a palpable lesion at the site of injection which is likely to persist for over a year should be expected. It should also be understood that rams vaccinated in this way may not be totally resistant to Brucella ovis and may still become infected.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	v
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	xiii
List of Plates	xviii
Chapter 1	1
Literature Review.	
Chapter 2	25
Investigations on the characteristics of <u>Brucella ovis</u> isolates from various sources including those used for vaccine manufacture and those used for experimental infection in this project.	
Chapter 3	33
The serological response of rams to vaccination against <u>Brucella ovis</u> infection.	
Chapter 4	84
Local tissue reaction to the administration of an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> saline-in-oil vaccine.	
Chapter 5	137
The artificial infection of sheep with <u>Brucella ovis</u> (pilot trial).	
Chapter 6	165
The response of vaccinated rams to an experimental challenge using <u>Brucella ovis</u> .	
Chapter 7	186
The response of vaccinated rams to a range of experimental challenge using <u>Brucella ovis</u> (ID50 trial).	

TABLE OF CONTENTS - (CONTINUED)

	Page
General Discussion	227
Bibliography	238
Appendix 1 Microbiological Methods.	251
Appendix 2 Serological Methods.	259
Appendix 3 Histological Methods.	265
Appendix 4 Enumeration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> organisms.	270
Appendix 5 Semen Collection.	277
Appendix 6 Statistical Methods.	278

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 2.1	<u>Brucella ovis</u> Isolates Tested By Bacterial Restriction Endonuclease DNA Analysis (BRENDA).	28
Table 3.1	Schedule Of Vaccination And Blood Collection Procedures In A Study Of The Serological Response Of Rams To Vaccination Against <u>Brucella ovis</u> Infection.	47
Table 3.2	Examples Of The Format Used In Reporting Complement Fixation Test Results.	41
Table 3.3	Interpretation Parameters Used For The <u>Brucella ovis</u> Complement Fixation And Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay Tests.	42
Table 3.4	Repeatability Of The Complement Fixation Test And The Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay Tests.	72
Table 3.5	Efficiency Of The Complement Fixation Test, Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay And Gel Diffusion Tests In Detecting Antibody Response To Vaccination Against <u>Brucella ovis</u> Infection.	73
Table 4.1	Serological Response of Sheep to Simultaneous Subcutaneous and Intraperitoneal Vaccination Using A <u>Brucella ovis</u> Vaccine.	92
Table 4.2	Gross Findings At The Subcutaneous Injection Site In 14 Sheep Vaccinated Using A <u>Brucella ovis</u> Vaccine.	94
Table 4.3	Necropsy Findings At The Abdominal Injection Site In 14 Sheep Vaccinated By The Intraperitoneal Technique Using <u>Brucella ovis</u> Vaccine.	98
Table 4.4	Histological Findings at the Subcutaneous Site of Administration of an Inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> Saline-in-Oil Vaccine.	110

LIST OF TABLES - (CONTINUED)

		Page
Table 4.4 (continued)		111
Table 4.5	Weights Of Prescapular Lymph Nodes And Sizes Of Subcutaneous Lesions In Animals Vaccinated Using <u>Brucella ovis</u> Vaccine Administered By Both The Subcutaneous And The Intraperitoneal Routes.	125
Table 5.1	The Presence of Lesions Palpated in the Epididymis of Five Rams Inoculated Intravenously Using Approximately 1.3×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> Organisms.	148
Table 5.2	Site of the Lesions of the Epididymis Palpated in Rams Inoculated Intravenously using Approximately 1.3×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> Organisms.	149
Table 5.3	The Detection of Acid-Fast Bacteria in Smears of Semen Stained by the Modified Ziehl-Neelsen Technique, and the Culture of <u>Brucella ovis</u> from Semen in Rams Inoculated Intravenously using Approximately 1.3×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> Bacteria.	151
Table 5.4	Complement Fixation Titre Scores of Rams Inoculated Intravenously Using Approximately 1.3×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> Organisms.	155
Table 5.5	ELISA Titres of Rams Inoculated Intravenously Using Approximately 1.3×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> Organisms.	156
Table 5.6	Gel Diffusion Test Results of Rams Inoculated Intravenously Using Approximately 1.3×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> Organisms.	157
Table 5.7	Chronological Sequence of Events Following The Intravenous Inoculation of Five Rams Using Approximately 1.3×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> Organisms.	160

LIST OF TABLES - (CONTINUED)

		Page
Table 6.1	Schedule Of Experimental Procedures In A Trial Examining The Response Of Vaccinated Rams To Intravenous Challenge Using <u>Brucella ovis</u> Organisms.	172
Table 6.2	Number of rams either unvaccinated, or vaccinated either once or twice by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal technique using <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine, which had epididymitis, or <u>Brucella ovis</u> isolated from the semen, after the intravenous inoculation of approximately 1.63×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> organisms.	181
Table 7.1	Schedule Of Experimental Procedures In A Trial Investigating The Response Of Vaccinated And Unvaccinated Rams To A Range Of <u>Brucella ovis</u> Challenge Doses.	195
Table 7.2	Number Of Unvaccinated Rams Which Developed A Positive Reaction To The <u>Brucella ovis</u> Complement Fixation Test After The Administration Of Intravenous Challenge Doses Of Varying Magnitude.	200
Table 7.3	Number Of Rams Which Became Infected In Each Treatment Group After The Administration Of Intravenous <u>Brucella ovis</u> Challenge Doses Of Varying Magnitude.	204
Table 7.4	<u>Brucella ovis</u> ID50 Estimates And Their 95% Confidence Limits For Unvaccinated Rams And For Rams Vaccinated Either Once By The Intraperitoneal Method, Twice By The Intraperitoneal Method Or Twice By The Subcutaneous Technique. Estimated By The LOGIT Transformation.	212

LIST OF TABLES - (CONTINUED)

	Page
Table 7.5	213
<u>Brucella ovis</u> ID50 Estimates And Their 95% Confidence Limits For Unvaccinated Rams And For Rams Vaccinated Either Once By The Intraperitoneal Method, Twice By The Intraperitoneal Method Or Twice By The Subcutaneous Technique. Estimated By The LOGIT Transformation.	

LIST OF FIGURES

		Page
Figure 3.1	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> saline-in-oil vaccine administered either once or twice by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal route. Mean complement fixation titre scores.	51
Figure 3.2	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered once by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal route. Mean complement fixation titre scores and 95% confidence limits.	52
Figure 3.3	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered twice by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal route. Mean complement fixation titre scores and 95% confidence limits.	52
Figure 3.4	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered either once or twice by the subcutaneous route. Mean complement fixation titre scores and 95% confidence limits.	53
Figure 3.5	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered either once or twice by the intraperitoneal route. Mean complement fixation titre scores and 95% confidence limits.	53
Figure 3.6	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered either once by the subcutaneous route or twice by the intraperitoneal route. Mean complement fixation titre scores and 95% confidence limits.	54

LIST OF FIGURES - (CONTINUED)

		Page
Figure 3.7	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered either once by the intraperitoneal route or twice by the subcutaneous route. Mean complement fixation titre scores and 95% confidence limits.	54
Figure 3.8	Percentage of rams having a positive reaction to the complement fixation test (i.e. a titre score of 8-24) after having been vaccinated either once or twice by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal route using an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine.	55
Figure 3.9	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> saline-in-oil vaccine administered either once or twice by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal route. Mean ELISA titres.	58
Figure 3.10	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered once by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal route. Mean ELISA titres and 95% confidence limits.	59
Figure 3.11	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered twice by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal route. Mean ELISA titres and 95% confidence limits.	59
Figure 3.12	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered either once or twice by the subcutaneous route. Mean ELISA titres and 95% confidence limits.	60

LIST OF FIGURES - (CONTINUED)

		Page
Figure 3.13	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered either once or twice by the intraperitoneal route. Mean ELISA titres and 95% confidence limits.	60
Figure 3.14	Serological response of rams to an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered either once by the intraperitoneal route or twice by the subcutaneous route. Mean ELISA titres and 95% confidence limits.	61
Figure 3.15	Percentage of rams having a positive reaction to the ELISA test (i.e. a titre of 90 or more) after having been vaccinated either once or twice by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal route using an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine.	62
Figure 3.16	Percentage of rams having a positive reaction to the gel diffusion test after having been vaccinated either once or twice by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal route using an inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine.	64
Figure 3.17	Mean size of local lesion at the site of either the first, second or sole subcutaneous injection of inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine.	67
Figure 3.18	Proportion of local lesions resulting from either the first, second or sole subcutaneous injection of inactivated <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine which were 30mm or more in diameter.	68

LIST OF FIGURES - (CONTINUED)

		Page
Figure 3.19	Proportion of first, second or sole subcutaneous <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccination sites which had no lesion palpable.	69
Figure 6.1	Mean complement fixation titre scores of rams challenged by the intravenous inoculation of approximately 1.63×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> organisms, after receiving either one or two doses of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal method.	174
Figure 6.2	Mean ELISA titres of rams challenged by the intravenous inoculation of approximately 1.63×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> organisms, after receiving either one or two doses of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal method.	176
Figure 6.3	The percentage of rams having a positive reaction to the gel diffusion test after being vaccinated either once or twice using <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered by either the subcutaneous or the intraperitoneal method, and then challenged by the intravenous inoculation of approximately 1.63×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> organisms.	178
Figure 7.1	Mean complement fixation titre scores of rams following the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine either twice by the subcutaneous route, or once or twice by the intraperitoneal technique.	197

LIST OF FIGURES - (CONTINUED)

		Page
Figure 7.2	Percentage of rams having a positive reaction to the complement fixation test following the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine either twice by the subcutaneous route, or once or twice by the intraperitoneal technique.	198
Figure 7.3	Percentage of unvaccinated rams having a positive reaction to the complement fixation test following the administration of intravenous <u>Brucella ovis</u> challenge doses of varying magnitude.	201
Figure 7.4	Time (in weeks) following the administration of intravenous <u>Brucella ovis</u> challenge doses of varying magnitude before the first isolation of <u>Brucella ovis</u> from the semen of vaccinated and unvaccinated rams.	205
Figure 7.5	Time (in weeks) following the administration of intravenous <u>Brucella ovis</u> challenge doses of varying magnitude before the first isolation of <u>Brucella ovis</u> from the semen of unvaccinated rams or rams vaccinated either once or twice by the intraperitoneal technique or twice by the subcutaneous method.	206
Figure 7.6	Lowest dose of intravenous <u>Brucella ovis</u> organisms which caused infection in unvaccinated rams, rams vaccinated once or twice by the intraperitoneal technique, and rams vaccinated twice by the subcutaneous method.	207
Figure 7.7	Number of new cases of <u>Brucella ovis</u> infection detected at various times after the administration of a range of intravenous challenge doses of <u>Brucella ovis</u> organisms.	208

LIST OF PLATES

		Page
Plate 2.1	Band patterns resulting from Bacterial Restriction Endonuclease DNA Analysis (BRENDA) carried out on seven <u>Brucella ovis</u> isolates.	29
Plate 4.1	The sites used for the subcutaneous (neck) and intraperitoneal (flank) administration of the <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine.	90
Plate 4.2	Typical reaction in the neck of an animal following the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by the subcutaneous route.	95
Plate 4.3	Fibrino-purulent clots on serosal surfaces seen 24 hours after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by the intraperitoneal route.	99
Plate 4.4	Fibrinous inflammation of the omentum over the rumen, seen 24 hours after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by the intraperitoneal route.	99
Plate 4.5	An abscess-like structure near the right ovary. <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine had been administered by the intraperitoneal route three days earlier.	100
Plate 4.6	Fibrino-purulent exudate floating in the peritoneal fluid. <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine had been administered by the intraperitoneal route three days earlier.	100
Plate 4.7	Inflammation of the omentum seen three days after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by the intraperitoneal route.	101
Plate 4.8	<u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine, administered by the intraperitoneal method three days previously, trapped behind the parietal peritoneum in the flank region.	101

LIST OF PLATES - (CONTINUED)

		Page
Plate 4.9	Fibrinous tags adherent to the gall bladder. <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine had been administered by the intraperitoneal route seven days previously.	102
Plate 4.10	Mild inflammation of the parietal peritoneum observed seven days after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by the intraperitoneal route.	102
Plate 4.11	Severe inflammation of the omentum. <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine had been administered by the intraperitoneal route two weeks previously.	103
Plate 4.12	Fibrous adhesions between the omentum and the abdominal wall seen four weeks after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by the intraperitoneal route.	103
Plate 4.13	Nodular reaction on the surface of the diaphragm seen four weeks after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by the intraperitoneal route.	104
Plate 4.14	Severe and widespread inflammation of the omentum seen six weeks after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by the intraperitoneal route.	104
Plate 4.15	Fibrosis in the abdominal wall seen on the cut surface of the peritoneum at the site of injection. <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine had been administered by the intraperitoneal method ten weeks previously.	105
Plate 4.16	Subcutaneous injection site in the neck, 24 hours after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine.	112
Plate 4.17	Subcutaneous injection site three days after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine.	112

LIST OF PLATES - (CONTINUED)

		Page
Plate 4.18	Subcutaneous injection site seven days after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine.	113
Plate 4.19	Multinucleate giant cells seen at the subcutaneous site two weeks after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine.	113
Plate 4.20	Subcutaneous injection site four weeks after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine.	114
Plate 4.21	Oil spaces in the right prescapular lymph node of an animal 24 hours after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by both the subcutaneous and intraperitoneal routes.	114
Plate 4.22	Oil spaces seen in the prescapular lymph node of an animal two weeks after receiving <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine administered by both the subcutaneous and the intraperitoneal routes.	115
Plate 4.23	Focal areas of necrosis in a prescapular lymph node six weeks after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by both the subcutaneous and intraperitoneal routes.	115
Plate 4.24	Oil spaces seen in the medullary cords of a left prescapular node six weeks after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by both the subcutaneous and the intraperitoneal routes.	116
Plate 4.25	Multinucleate giant cells in a prescapular lymph node ten weeks after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by both the subcutaneous and intraperitoneal routes.	116
Plate 4.26	Diffuse leucocyte infiltration and oedema seen in the muscle tissue of the abdominal wall 24 hours after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine using the intraperitoneal technique.	120

LIST OF PLATES - (CONTINUED)

		Page
Plate 4.27	Large oil spaces lined with neutrophils in the tissue of the parietal peritoneum three days after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine using the intraperitoneal technique.	120
Plate 4.28	Oil spaces lined by macrophages and giant cells in the tissue of the parietal peritoneum seven days after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by the intraperitoneal technique.	121
Plate 4.29	Granulomatous inflammation containing oil spaces seen on the surface of the diaphragm four weeks after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by the intraperitoneal technique.	121
Plate 4.30	Granulomatous inflammation containing oil spaces, seen in the omentum four weeks after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by the intraperitoneal technique.	122
Plate 4.31	Oil spaces and necrosis surrounded by granulomatous inflammation, seen in the peritoneum six weeks after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by the intraperitoneal technique.	122
Plate 4.32	An aggregation of multinucleate giant cells in a prefemoral lymph node after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine by both the subcutaneous and the intraperitoneal routes.	123
Plate 4.33	Oil spaces surrounded by macrophages, and, without an associated reaction, in the subcapsular region; in a lumbar aortic lymph node. <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine had been administered by both the subcutaneous and intraperitoneal routes four weeks previously.	123

LIST OF PLATES - (CONTINUED)

		Page
Plate 4.34	The difference in size between the left and right prescapular lymph nodes of an animal vaccinated subcutaneously using <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine on the right side of the neck.	126
Plate 4.35	Parietal peritoneal surface of the right flank, showing a lesion present six months after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine using the intraperitoneal technique.	128
Plate 4.36	Same lesion as above, incised to show semisolid yellow contents.	128
Plate 4.37	Incised lesion on the parietal peritoneal surface of the right flank, showing white vaccine, six months after the administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine using the intraperitoneal technique.	129
Plate 4.38	Two distinct lesions in the musculature of the right flank, and serosal adhesions to the viscera. The ram had been vaccinated twice with <u>Brucella ovis</u> vaccine using the intraperitoneal technique, six months earlier.	129
Plate 5.1	Blood agar plates which have been inoculated using four serial tenfold dilutions of a suspension of <u>Brucella ovis</u> bacteria, so that a viable count for the estimation of the bacterial concentration of the original suspension can be made.	146
Plate 5.2	<u>Brucella ovis</u> bacteria inside neutrophils in a smear of semen stained by the Modified Ziehl-Neelsen method.	152
Plate 5.3	An accumulation of <u>Brucella ovis</u> bacteria outside a neutrophil in a semen smear stained by the Modified Ziehl-Neelsen method.	152

LIST OF PLATES - (CONTINUED)

		Page
Plate 5.4	Necrotic material, giant cells, mononuclear cells and fibrosis at the edge of a chronic sperm granuloma found in the tail of the right epididymis in a ram inoculated intravenously using approximately 1.3×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> bacteria two years before necropsy.	159
Plate 5.5	Lymphocytes densely packed around blood vessels in an area of chronic fibrosis seen surrounding a chronic sperm granuloma in the tail of the right epididymis of a ram inoculated intravenously using approximately 1.3×10^8 <u>Brucella ovis</u> bacteria two years before necropsy.	159
Plate 7.1	Semen samples from rams challenged by the intravenous administration of <u>Brucella ovis</u> bacteria.	215