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Epidemiological studies to inform control strategies for paratuberculosis in farmed deer

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Abstract

Paratuberculosis, caused by *Mycobacterium avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* (MAP), occurs in a range of ruminant species, and has been diagnosed in wild and domesticated deer worldwide. The disease process in other ruminants is chronic and fatal, with the highest clinical disease incidence generally seen in older animals. However, in farmed deer, disease incidence is highest in young animals, occurring as an acute syndrome in deer as young as eight months of age. The deer industry in New Zealand is concerned about the on-farm impact of paratuberculosis, and the consequences for the venison market should MAP be classified as a zoonosis. Research is thus directed at investigating tools for paratuberculosis control, to reduce the threat to the industry.

The aim of the research presented in this thesis was to provide epidemiological evidence that can be used to inform strategy, at industry and farm-level, for control of paratuberculosis in deer.

A survey of the deer slaughter population established a baseline prevalence of MAP infection, against which the effects of control initiatives can be measured. Infection was widespread in individuals (45%) and herds (59%), suggesting control rather than eradication as the goal of any industry programme.

On-farm disease control was investigated in a randomised controlled trial of vaccine efficacy in young naturally-infected deer. Vaccination reduced the incidence of clinical disease and subclinical pathology; no significant effect on mean production parameters was seen. There was no effect of vaccination on faecal MAP excretion, indicating vaccination may not reduce infection prevalence. Vaccinated deer had an increased risk of testing positively to diagnostic screening tests for bovine tuberculosis. Non-specificity was resolved by ancillary testing, but such tests come at an increased financial and test sensitivity cost.

Paratuberculosis control at the industry level may involve schemes to classify herd infection status. For this purpose, the sensitivity and specificity of individual faecal culture and

an IgG1 ELISA (Paralisa) to detect young deer infected with MAP was estimated using Bayesian latent class analysis. Paralisa and faecal culture had sensitivity of 19% and 77%, and specificity of 94% and 99%, respectively. Improved diagnostics are therefore needed if herd infection status is to be classified in a sensitive, specific, cost-effective and timely system.

The studies contribute to knowledge on different aspects of paratuberculosis control in the New Zealand farmed deer population, providing an evidence base for informed decision-making at farm and industry level.

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I arrived at Massey University with high hopes of expanding and enhancing my epidemiological skills while doing useful applied animal health research. On both counts my expectations were met in full and I sincerely thank my three supervisors Peter Wilson, Cord Heuer and Colin Mackintosh for guiding me, and for being so generous with their time and in sharing their knowledge and expertise. I particularly appreciated the diversity of opinion that would come out of our group discussions and felt I benefited hugely from the different perspective that each of you brought to scientific debate.

It has been a privilege to work with and for New Zealand deer farmers in some of the most beautiful places on earth, and I thank all who gave freely of their time, labour and patience during the vaccine trial. Thanks, too, to the vets who helped with recruitment and on-farm diagnosis. Noel Beatson, especially, put a huge personal effort into the field work of the trial, giving this deer-farming novice the benefit of his experience and knowledge of deer and (even more importantly) deer farmers. Thanks also to Geoff de Lisle and Gary Yates at Wallaceville for advice and diagnostic support that helped me get the best results from the projects and to all at DRL, Otago University for getting me started on PCR methodology.

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Nomenclature

AHB	Animal Health Board
CCT	Comparative cervical test
CI	Confidence/credible interval
DINZ	Deer Industry New Zealand
ETB	ELISA for bovine tuberculosis
GLM	Generalised linear model
IFC	Individual faecal culture
JD	Johne's disease
JML	Johne's Management Limited
LSS	Lesion severity score
MAP	<i>Mycobacterium avium</i> subsp. <i>paratuberculosis</i>
MCMC	Markov chain Monte Carlo
MCT	Mid-cervical test
OD	Optical density
OIE	World Organisation for Animal Health
PCR	Polymerase chain reaction
TB	Tuberculosis

List of Publications

Goodwin-Ray K, Stringer LA, Wilson PR, Heuer C, Glossop JC. Vaccination of deer for Johne's disease with Silirum: Safety, dose and tuberculosis test cross - reactivity. In: *Proceedings of a Deer Course for Veterinarians, Deer Branch of the New Zealand Veterinary Association*. Pp 44-9, 2008.

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Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Nomenclature	vii
List of Publications	ix
Preface	xix
1 Introduction	1
1.1 The New Zealand Deer Industry	1
1.2 Paratuberculosis in deer	2
1.3 Thesis aim and structure	4
2 Literature review	7
2.1 Introduction	7
2.2 Transmission and pathogenesis	8
2.3 Control measures	11
2.3.1 Test and cull	11
2.3.2 Management interventions	16
2.3.3 Vaccination	24
2.4 Effectiveness of control measures	26
2.4.1 Test-and-cull and management interventions	26
2.4.2 Vaccination	30
2.5 Cost-effectiveness of control measures	34
2.5.1 Cattle	34
2.5.2 Sheep	36

2.5.3	Deer	36
2.6	Conclusions	36
3	MAP prevalence study	39
3.1	Abstract	39
3.2	Introduction	40
3.3	Materials and methods	41
3.4	Results	43
3.5	Discussion	46
3.6	Acknowledgements	50
4	Vaccine efficacy trial	53
4.1	Abstract	53
4.2	Introduction	54
4.3	Materials and Methods	55
4.4	Results	60
4.5	Discussion	67
4.6	Acknowledgements	71
5	TB test reactivity	73
5.1	Abstract	73
5.2	Introduction	74
5.3	Materials and Methods	76
5.3.1	Study 1: Effect of vaccination on tests for bovine TB	76
5.3.2	Study 2: Risk factors for MCT reactivity	78
5.4	Results	80
5.4.1	Study 1	80
5.4.2	Study 2	81
5.5	Discussion	84
5.6	Acknowledgements	88
6	Test validation study	91
6.1	Abstract	91
6.2	Introduction	92

	xiii
6.3 Materials and Methods	94
6.4 Results	99
6.5 Discussion	102
6.6 Acknowledgements	107
7 General Discussion	109
7.1 Introduction	109
7.2 Review of the individual epidemiological studies	110
7.3 Implication of thesis findings for paratuberculosis control	120
7.4 Future work	123
7.5 Conclusion	125
Bibliography	127
A Appendix 1: WinBUGS Bayesian model code	A-1

List of Figures

4.1	Boxplot of average daily liveweight gain of vaccine trial deer	63
4.2	Proportion of vaccinates and controls shedding MAP in faeces	64
4.3	Kaplan-Meier survival function of time to slaughter	66
4.4	Proportion of carcasses with gross lymph node pathology	67
5.1	Spatial distribution of TB reactivity study herds	79
5.2	Study 1: TB test results	80
6.1	Spatial distribution of test validation study herds	95
6.2	Distribution of test positive deer	100
6.3	Prior and posterior distributions from latent class analysis	101

List of Tables

3.1	Isolation of MAP from normal mesenteric lymph nodes	44
3.2	Univariate associations between MAP infection and predictor variables .	45
3.3	Logistic regression model output	46
4.1	Summary of statistical methods used to assess vaccine efficacy	60
4.2	Clinical disease incidence in vaccinates and controls	62
5.1	Herd-level MCT and MAP results	81
5.2	Univariate associations between risk factors and MCT reactivity	83
5.3	Logistic regression model output	84
6.1	Prior information for Bayesian analysis	98
6.2	IFC and Paralisa positive deer by herd and island	99
6.3	Posterior estimates of test sensitivity and specificity	102

Preface

There is a theory which states that if ever anybody discovers exactly what the Universe is for and why it is here, it will instantly disappear and be replaced by something even more bizarre and inexplicable. There is another theory which states that this has already happened.

Douglas Adams