

DETERMINING THE IMPACT OF PROTOZOAN AND STRONGYLID PARASITES ON MEAT LAMB PRODUCTIVITY

UTILISING MOLECULAR DIAGNOSTIC METHODS FOR THE DETECTION OF INTERNAL PARASITES IN LAMBS

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ABSTRACT

Internal parasites (strongylid gastrointestinal helminths) have been reported to decrease lamb productivity in extensive grazing sheep enterprises. Increased interest into intestinal, protozoan parasites; *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*, has arisen due to their potential public health risks. Little research has examined their prevalence and impact on productivity in extensively managed livestock. Despite molecular diagnostic techniques having the capability to facilitate rapid identification, improve control and enhance prevention strategies for disease pathogens, little investigation has been conducted to compare molecular tests with traditional diagnostic methods.

Longitudinal studies observed that 47–81% of lambs sampled, tested positive for *Cryptosporidium* or *Giardia* at least once in their lives over five sampling occasions. *Cryptosporidium xiaoi* and *G. duodenalis* assemblage E were the most common species/genotypes isolated from Pingelly (Farm A) and Arthur River (Farm B). Zoonotic species/genotypes were also isolated but in low numbers. *Cryptosporidium xiaoi* was isolated on two occasions from dam water on Arthur River, while *C. ubiquitum* and *G. duodenalis* assemblage E were detected in dam water from Frankland. A novel, possibly new genotype (sheep genotype I) was identified in six *Cryptosporidium* isolates from Arthur River. *Cryptosporidium parvum* and *C. ubiquitum* were the most common species detected in Boyup Brook and Kojonup flocks.

Statistical analyses revealed lambs positive for *Cryptosporidium* on at least one sampling occasion had lighter HCWs and lower dressing percentages when compared to lambs never positive for *Cryptosporidium* for Farms A and B, respectively. On Farm B,

lambs positive for *Giardia* on at least one occasion had lighter HCWs and lower dressing percentages when compared to lambs never positive for *Giardia*. *Cryptosporidium*-positive lambs at the second sampling were 3.84–4.72 times more likely to have non-pelleted faeces (faecal consistency score [FCS] ≥ 3), when compared to *Cryptosporidium*-negative lambs for Farms A and B. Lambs on Boyup Brook and Kojonup farms that were positive for *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia* or both, were 2.4–14.0 times more likely to have non-pelleted faeces. Furthermore, a higher number of internal parasites detected per lamb was associated with lower body condition score (BCS) and higher FCS on the Boyup Brook and Kojonup farms. *Cryptosporidium*-positive lambs were 3.36–2.96 times more likely to have moderate to severe breech fleece faecal soiling scores (3 – 5), when compared to *Cryptosporidium*-negative lambs at the second sampling for Farms A and B. Live weight, growth rate and BCS were inconsistently associated with protozoa detection across different samplings and farms.

A further study compared the performances of two lamb flocks exposed to different natural strongylid larval challenges. A new innovative, molecular approach was developed to recover strongylid larvae from pasture, which had a strong, negative correlation ($r^2=0.91-0.95$) with pasture larval counts used to detect and quantify strongylid larvae species on pasture. Flock L (exposed to a low larval challenge) had greater dressing percentages greater than Flock S (exposed to a higher larvae challenge). Within flock analyses of the Frankland flocks found lambs positive for *Giardia* at least once had lighter HCWs and lower dressing percentages, when compared to lambs never positive for *Giardia*.

A written questionnaire which surveyed 139 (41.4%) meat lamb enterprise owners/managers in southern Western Australia, found evidence of diarrhoea was reported on 64.8% of farms. A binary logistic regression analysis revealed that the source of livestock drinking water was associated with the incidence of diarrhoea. Lamb flocks that sourced water from a dam, were 117 times more likely to have active or recent evidence of diarrhoea. Overall, 10.1% and 14.4% of respondents were aware of *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*, respectively.

Comparison between a molecular diagnostic technique (identifying strongylid species by screening genomic DNA extracted directly from faeces) and the traditional McMaster WEC method, found high levels of agreement (kappa statistic ≥ 0.93) between the test results for detecting patent strongylid infections in two separate epidemiological studies. The findings that some lambs tested negative for strongylid infections while grazing pastures known to be infested with larvae, together with the strong correlations between WEC and the number of strongylid species detected per lamb, both suggest that strongylid eggs are the likely main source of strongylid DNA.

The findings of this thesis suggest that molecular identification of internal parasites is potentially negatively associated with phenotypic performance traits of lambs. Protozoa-positive lambs had reduced production performances (lighter carcass weights and reduced dressing percentage), when compared to protozoa-negative lambs. For such molecular techniques as that were employed in this research to be introduced into routine veterinary diagnostics, they need to: (1) quantify the magnitude of infections, (2) provide cost-benefits to sheep producers, (3) display consistent associations/correlations with phenotypic performance traits of livestock and (4) be cost-beneficial for diagnostic laboratories to

conduct (sales volume and equipment costs). The future development of multiplex, real-time, quantitative PCR (qPCR) assays capable of detecting and quantifying multiple pathogen infections (parasites and bacteria) in a single assay, would facilitate the uptake of such tests for both veterinary and human diagnostics

DECLARATION

I declare this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content, work which has not been previously submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification. I declare that I have conducted the research described except where otherwise acknowledged.

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Signature

Joshua Paul Alexander Sweeny

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SYMBOLS

\approx :	approximately
β :	beta
$^{\circ}\text{C}$:	degrees Celsius
$=$:	equals
$>$:	greater than
\geq :	greater than or equal to
κ :	kappa statistic
$<$:	less than
\leq :	less than or equal to
μ :	micro
\ddot{i} :	naive

ABBREVIATIONS

ABARE:	Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics
<i>ad libitum</i> :	freely available (Latin)
ANOVA:	Analysis of variance
AQIS:	Australian Quarantine and Inspective Services
AUD:	Australian dollars
BZ:	benzimidazole
<i>C. jejuni</i> :	<i>Campylobacter jejuni</i>
<i>C. ovina</i> :	<i>Chabertia ovina</i>
CI:	confidence interval
CMI:	cell mediated immunity
<i>Cp. pecorum</i> :	<i>Chlamydophila pecorum</i>
C _q :	cycle number at which the fluorescence threshold was exceeded
DM:	dry matter
DM%:	dry matter percentage
DMI:	dry matter intake
DNA:	deoxyribonucleic acid

dNTP:	Deoxyribonucleotide triphosphate
DSE:	dry sheep equivalent
<i>E. coli:</i>	<i>Escherichia coli</i>
ELISA:	enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay
epg:	eggs per gram
<i>et al.</i>	and others (Latin <i>et alii</i>)
FCS:	faecal consistency score
FDM%:	faecal dry matter percentage
FECRT:	faecal (worm) egg count reduction test
FOO:	feed on offer
g:	gram
<i>g:</i>	unit
<i>H. contortus:</i>	<i>Haemonchus contortus</i>
HCW:	hot carcass weight
hr:	hour(s)
kg:	kilogram
km:	kilometres
L:	litres

L ₁ :	first stage larvae
L ₂ :	second stage larvae
L ₃ :	third stage larvae
L ₄ :	fourth stage larvae
L ₅ :	fifth stage adult larvae
LV:	levamisole
mRNA:	mitochondrial ribonucleic acid
mg:	milligram
MgCl ₂ :	Magnesium Chloride
min:	minute(s)
mL:	millilitre
ML:	marcocyclic lactone
MLA:	Meat and Livestock Australia
mm:	millimetres
mM:	milli molar
n/a:	not applicable
n/s:	not significant
OP:	organophosphate

OJD:	Ovine Johne's disease
pg:	picogram
pH:	negative log of hydrogen ion concentration
PETA:	People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
PCR:	polymerase chain reaction
PPRI:	peri-parturient relaxation of immunity
qPCR:	quantitative real-time PCR
rDNA:	ribosomal deoxyribonucleic acid
r^2 :	linear regression correlation coefficient
RNA:	Ribonucleic acid
rRNA:	ribosomal ribonucleic acid
s:	second(s)
S.E.M.:	standard error of the mean
S.E.D.	standard error of the difference
swt:	shipped weight
spp.:	species
<i>T. circumcincta</i> :	<i>Teladorsagia circumcincta</i>
U:	units

UK:	United Kingdom
μM:	micromolar
USA:	United States of America
WA:	Western Australia
WEC:	faecal worm egg count

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DECLARATION	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
PUBLICATIONS	x
AWARDS	xv
SYMBOLS	xvii
ABBREVIATIONS	xviii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	xxiii
LIST OF TABLES	xxxiv
LIST OF FIGURES	xxxix
LIST OF EQUATIONS	xlvi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 SHEEP AND LAMB INDUSTRY IN AUSTRALIA.....	1
1.2 INTERNAL PARASITES IN SOUTHERN AUSTRALIAN FLOCKS.....	2
1.3 THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF STRONGYLID WORMS ON SHEEP ENTERPRISE PRODUCTION IN SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA	2
1.3 RECENT ADVANCES IN UNDERSTANDING PROTOZOA IN SHEEP.....	4
1.4 THESIS OUTLINE	5
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	6
2.1 WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SHEEP AND LAMB PRODUCTION	6
2.1.1 GENERAL INDUSTRY OVERVIEW	6
2.1.2 TRENDS IN SHEEP AND LAMB PRODUCTION	7
2.1.1.1 Lamb production, carcase price, consumer expenditure and export	8
2.1.1.2 Number of meat lamb farms and changing flock demographics	11

2.2 THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF INTERNAL PARASITES ON THE AUSTRALIAN SHEEP INDUSTRY	12
2.2.1 DIARRHOEA AND BLOWFLY STRIKE	14
2.3 INFECTIOUS PATHOGENS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA ASSOCIATED WITH PRODUCTION LOSSES AND DIARRHOEA IN LAMBS.....	15
2.4 STRONGYLID NEMATODE INFECTIONS	16
2.4.1 TAXONOMY	16
2.4.1.1 Major strongylid sheep worms in Western Australia	16
2.4.2 LIFE CYCLE AND TRANSMISSION.....	19
2.4.2.1 The periparturient relaxation of immunity	21
2.4.3 CLINICAL SIGNS AND PATHOLOGY	22
2.4.3.1 <i>Trichostrongylus</i> spp. infections	22
2.4.3.2 Larval hypersensitivity scouring syndrome	23
2.4.3.3 <i>Teladorsagia circumcincta</i> infections	24
2.4.3.4 <i>Haemonchus contortus</i> infections	25
2.4.3.5 <i>Cooperia</i> and <i>Nematodirus</i> infections	27
2.4.3.6 <i>Oesophagostomum</i> and <i>Chabertia</i> infections	27
2.4.4 CONSEQUENCES FOR SHEEP PRODUCTION.....	28
2.4.4.1 Reduction in feed intake	28
2.4.4.2 Overall effect of worm challenge on productivity of meat lambs	30
2.4.5 TREATMENT, ANTHELMINTIC RESISTANCE AND CONTROL.....	31
2.4.5.1 Anthelmintic treatment and resistance	32
2.4.5.2 Strongylid worm control programs	34
2.4.6 DIAGNOSIS.....	35
2.5 <i>CRYPTOSPORIDIUM</i> INFECTIONS.....	38
2.5.1 TAXONOMY	39
2.5.2 LIFE CYCLE AND TRANSMISSION.....	41
2.5.3 CLINICAL SIGNS, AND PATHOLOGY.....	43
2.5.4 PRODUCTION LOSS	45
2.5.5 DIAGNOSIS.....	46
2.5.5.1 Nucleic acid detection based on PCR and qPCR	47
2.5.6 TREATMENT AND CONTROL.....	47

2.5.6.1 New drug targets and new treatments	49
2.6 <i>GIARDIA</i> INFECTIONS	49
2.6.1 TAXONOMY	50
2.6.2 LIFE CYCLE AND TRANSMISSION.....	52
2.6.3 CLINICAL SIGNS AND PATHOLOGY	54
2.6.4 PRODUCTION LOSS	56
2.6.5 DIAGNOSIS.....	57
2.6.5.1 Nucleic acid detection based on PCR	58
2.6.6 TREATMENT AND CONTROL.....	58
2.6.6.1 New drug targets and new treatments	59
2.6.6.2 Control Programs	60
2.7 PROTOZOAN ZOO NOTIC TRANSMISSION	60
2.7.1 <i>CRYPTOSPORIDIUM</i> ZOO NOTIC TRANSMISSION.....	61
2.7.2 <i>GIARDIA</i> ZOO NOTIC TRANSMISSION	62
2.8 <i>EIMERIA</i> INFECTIONS	63
2.8.1 LIFE CYCLE AND TRANSMISSION.....	65
2.8.2 CLINICAL SIGNS, PATHOLOGY AND PRODUCTION LOSS	66
2.8.3 TREATMENT	67
2.9 BACTERIAL INFECTIONS	68
2.9.1 <i>SALMONELLA</i>	71
2.9.2 <i>CAMPYLOBACTER</i>	71
2.9.3 OVINE JOHNE'S DISEASE	71
2.9.4 <i>LISTERIA</i>	72
2.9.5 <i>YERSINIA</i>	72
2.9.6 <i>CLOSTRIDIUM</i>	73
2.9.7 <i>CHLAMYDOPHILA</i>	73
2.10 VIRAL INFECTIONS.....	73
2.11 NON-PATHOGENIC FACTORS INFLUENCING LAMB PRODUCTION PERFORMANCE AND FAECAL ATTRIBUTES	74
2.12 LITERATURE REVIEW CONCLUSION	75
2.10 PROJECT AIMS	76
2.10 HYPOTHESES	78

CHAPTER 3: MATERIALS AND METHODS	80
3.1 HUMAN AND ANIMAL ETHICS APPROVAL	80
3.2 CHOICE OF SAMPLING LOCATIONS.....	80
3.3 ANIMALS.....	83
3.4 FAECAL SAMPLES.....	84
3.5 FAECAL CONSISTENCY SCORE	85
3.6 FAECAL DRY MATTER	87
3.7 BREECH FLEECE FAECAL SOILING SCORE.....	87
3.8 PARASITOLOGY.....	88
3.8.1 FAECAL WORM EGG COUNT	88
3.8.1.1 Factors affecting WEC	90
3.8.1.2 Interpretation of WEC	91
3.8.2 LARVAL CULTURE DIFFERENTIATION	92
3.8.3 PASTURE LARVAL COUNTS.....	93
3.9 DNA EXTRACTION, AMPLIFICATION AND SEQUENCING	94
3.9.1 EXTRACTION OF GENOMIC DNA FROM FAECES	94
3.9.2 EXTRACTION OF GENOMIC DNA FROM STRONGYLID LARVAE	94
3.9.3 EXTRACTION OF GENOMIC DNA FROM LIVESTOCK WATER.....	96
3.9.4 DNA AMPLIFICATION.....	97
3.9.4.1 Amplification of <i>Cryptosporidium</i> at the 18S rRNA gene	97
3.9.4.2 Amplification of <i>Cryptosporidium</i> at the actin gene	98
3.9.4.3 Amplification of <i>C. parvum</i> at a diagnostic locus by qPCR	98
3.9.4.4 Amplification of <i>C. parvum</i> at the gp60 gene	99
3.9.4.5 Amplification of <i>Giardia</i> at the glutamine dehydrogenase gene	100
3.9.4.6 Amplification of <i>Giardia</i> at the triosephosphate isomerase gene	101
3.9.4.7 Amplification of <i>Giardia</i> at the β -giardin gene	103
3.9.4.8 Amplification of strongylid species at the ITS-2 rDNA locus together with 28S rRNA gene	104
3.9.4.9 Amplification of strongylid species at the ITS-2 locus by qPCR	105
3.9.4.10 Amplification of <i>Salmonella</i> and <i>C. jejuni</i> by PCR	106
3.9.5 AGAROSE GEL ELECTROPHORESIS.....	107
3.9.6 PRE SEQUENCE REACTION DNA PURIFICATION FROM GEL.....	107

3.9.7 SEQUENCE REACTION	108
3.9.8 POST REACTION PURIFICATION USING ETHANOL PRECIPITATION....	109
3.10 SEQUENCE AND PHYLOGENETIC ANALYSIS.....	109
3.11 STATISTICS.....	110
3.12 CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT	111
CHAPTER 4: SURVEY OF DIARRHOEA IN MEAT LAMB FLOCKS IN WA	112
PREVALENCE AND ON-FARM RISK FACTORS FOR DIARRHOEA IN MEAT LAMB FLOCKS IN WA.....	112
4.1 INTRODUCTION	112
4.1 AIMS AND HYPOTHESES.....	113
4.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	114
4.2.1 STUDY POPULATION AND MAILING	114
4.2.2 QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY DESIGN.....	115
4.2.3 AGRICULTURE ZONES.....	116
4.2.4 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS.....	117
4.3 RESULTS	118
4.3.1 RESPONSE RATE	118
4.3.2 MEAT LAMB ENTERPRISE CHARACTERISTICS.....	119
4.3.3 REPORTED DIARRHOEA PREVALENCE IN MEAT LAMBS	119
4.3.4 PROPORTION OF MEAT LAMBS PER ENTERPRISE REPORTED WITH DIARRHOEA	119
4.3.5 DIARRHOEA RISK FACTOR ANALYSES.....	122
4.3.6 SHEEP MANAGEMENT PRACTICES RELEVANT TO DIARRHOEA.....	125
4.3.7 RESPONDENT AWARENESS OF PROTOZOAN AND COCCIDIAN PARASITES	126
4.3.8 RESPONDENT RESPONSES TO DEFINED DIARRHOEA SCENARIOS...	126
4.4 DISCUSSION	127
4.5 CONCLUSION.....	132
CHAPTER 5: DIFFERENT STRONGYLID INFECTION DETECTION METHODS.....	133

COMPARISON OF MOLECULAR AND MCMASTER MICROSCOPY TECHNIQUES TO CONFIRM THE PRESENCE OF NATURALLY ACQUIRED STRONGYLID NEMATODE INFECTIONS IN SHEEP	133
5.1 INTRODUCTION	133
5.1.1 AIMS AND HYPOTHESES	134
5.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS	135
5.2.1 GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY SITES, FAECAL SAMPLE COLLECTION AND ANTHELMINTIC TREATMENTS	135
5.2.2 FAECAL WORM EGG COUNTS AND LARVAL CULTURES.....	136
5.2.3 DNA EXTRACTION	136
5.2.4 PCR AMPLIFICATION.....	137
5.2.5 SEQUENCE ANALYSIS	138
5.2.6 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS.....	140
5.3 RESULTS	140
5.3.1 PCR ASSAYS DIAGNOSTIC SENSITIVITY – SPIKED SAMPLES	140
5.3.2 AGREEMENT BETWEEN PCR ASSAYS AND WEC RESULTS	141
5.3.3 STRONGYLID NEMATODE PREVALENCE AND SPECIES DETECTED BY PCR AND LARVAL CULTURE.....	142
5.4 DISCUSSION	146
5.5 CONCLUSION.....	150
CHAPTER 6: STRONGYLID SPECIES EPIDEMIOLOGY IN MEAT LAMBS	151
MOLECULAR IDENTIFICATION OF NATURALLY ACQUIRED STRONGYLID INFECTIONS IN LAMBS – AN INVESTIGATION INTO HOW LAMB AGE INFLUENCES DIAGNOSTIC SENSITIVITY	151
6.1 INTRODUCTION	151
6.1.1 AIMS AND HYPOTHESES	153
6.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS	155
6.2.1 STUDY SITES, ANIMALS AND EXPERIMENTAL PROTOCOL	155
6.2.2 ANTHELMINTIC TREATMENT	157
6.2.3 GENOMIC DNA EXTRACTION	157
6.2.4 FAECAL WORM EGG COUNTS	159
6.2.5 PCR AMPLIFICATION.....	160

6.2.6 SEQUENCE ANALYSES.....	161
6.2.7 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS.....	161
6.3 RESULTS	162
6.3.1 PCR INHIBITION AND SPIKE ANALYSES	162
6.3.2 COMPARISON OF MCMASTER WEC WITH PCR	164
6.3.3 EPIDEMIOLOGY OF STRONGYLID SPECIES.....	166
6.3.4 MIXED STRONGYLID INFECTIONS.....	168
6.3.5 FAECAL WORM EGG COUNT CORRELATIONS WITH PCR RESULTS ...	168
6.4 DISCUSSION	169
6.5 CONCLUSION.....	173
CHAPTER 7: PROTOZOA EPIDEMIOLOGY IN MEAT LAMBS	175
LONGITUDINAL INVESTIGATION OF PROTOZOAN PARASITES IN MEAT LAMB FARMS IN SOUTHERN WA.....	175
7.1 INTRODUCTION	175
7.1.1 AIMS AND HYPOTHESES	176
7.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS	177
7.2.1 STUDY SITES, ANIMALS AND EXPERIMENTAL PROTOCOL	177
7.2.2 GENOMIC DNA EXTRACTION	179
7.2.3 PCR AMPLIFICATION.....	182
7.2.4 SEQUENCE AND PHYLOGENETIC ANALYSIS.....	183
7.2.5 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS.....	184
7.3 RESULTS	185
7.3.1 <i>CRYPTOSPORIDIUM</i> PREVALENCE.....	185
7.3.2 <i>CRYPTOSPORIDIUM</i> SPECIES AND GENOTYPES	191
7.3.3 <i>CRYPTOSPORIDIUM</i> PHYLOGENETIC ANALYSIS	199
7.3.4 <i>GIARDIA</i> PREVALENCE	199
7.3.5 <i>GIARDIA</i> ASSEMBLAGES	204
7.3.6 <i>GIARDIA</i> PHYLOGENETIC ANALYSIS.....	208
7.3.7 MIXED INFECTIONS OF <i>CRYPTOSPORIDIUM</i> AND <i>GIARDIA</i>	210
7.3.8 <i>EIMERIA</i>	210
7.4 DISCUSSION	211
7.4 CONCLUSION.....	216

CHAPTER 8: INTERNAL PARASITES ASSOCIATED WITH PRODUCTIVITY217

IMPACTS OF NATURALLY ACQUIRED PROTOZOA AND STRONGYLID NEMATODE INFECTIONS ON GROWTH AND FAECAL ATTRIBUTES IN LAMBS217

8.1 INTRODUCTION217

8.1.1 AIMS AND HYPOTHESES218

8.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS219

8.2.1 STUDY SITES, ANIMALS AND PRODUCTION MEASUREMENTS219

8.2.2 ANTHELMINTIC TREATMENT220

8.2.3 FAECAL WORM EGG COUNTS220

8.2.4 DNA EXTRACTION221

8.2.5 PCR AMPLIFICATION221

8.2.6 SEQUENCE AND PHYLOGENETIC ANALYSES223

8.2.6 STATISTICAL ANALYSES224

8.3 RESULTS226

8.3.1 INTERNAL PARASITE EPIDEMIOLOGY AND SPECIES PREVALENCE ...226

8.3.2 GROWTH RATE231

8.3.3 LIVE WEIGHT233

8.3.4 BODY CONDITION SCORE234

8.3.5 FAECAL CONSISTENCY236

8.3.6 FAECAL DRY MATTER238

8.4 DISCUSSION240

8.5 CONCLUSION243

CHAPTER 9: CARCASE MEASURES ASSOCIATED WITH INTERNAL PARASITES245

CRYPTOSPORIDIUM AND *GIARDIA* ASSOCIATED WITH REDUCED LAMB CARCASE PRODUCTIVITY245

9.1 INTRODUCTION245

9.1.1 AIMS AND HYPOTHESES247

9.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS248

9.2.1 STUDY SITES, ANIMALS AND PRODUCTION MEASUREMENTS248

9.2.2 ANTHELMINTIC TREATMENT	250
9.2.3 DNA EXTRACTION	250
9.2.4 PCR AMPLIFICATION.....	251
9.2.5 SEQUENCE ANALYSIS	253
9.2.6 FAECAL WORM EGG COUNTS	253
9.2.7 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS.....	253
9.3 RESULTS	256
9.3.1 PREVALENCE OF PROTOZOA, STRONGYLID NEMATODES AND <i>CAMPYLOBACTER JEJUNI</i>	256
9.3.2 CARCASS ATTRIBUTES	258
9.3.3 LIVE WEIGHT AND GROWTH RATE	262
9.3.4 BODY CONDITION SCORE.....	264
9.3.5 FAECAL CONSISTENCY AND DRY MATTER	266
9.3.6 BREECH FLEECE FAECAL SOILING.....	268
9.4 DISCUSSION	270
9.5 CONCLUSION.....	275
CHAPTER 10: COMPARING DIFFERENT STRONGYLID LARVAE CHALLENGES	277
DEVELOPMENT OF A MODIFIED MOLECULAR DIAGNOSTIC PROCEDURE FOR THE IDENTIFICATION AND QUANTIFICATION OF NATURALLY OCCURRING STRONGYLID LARVAE ON PASTURES.....	277
10.1 INTRODUCTION	277
10.1.1 AIMS AND HYPOTHESES	279
10.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	280
10.2.1 STUDY SITES, ANIMALS, ANTHELMINTIC TREATMENTS AND EXPERIMENTAL PROTOCOL	280
10.2.1.1 Study site	280
10.2.1.2 Animals, sample collection and measurements	284
10.2.1.3 Lamb management and anthelmintic treatment	285
10.2.3 FAECAL WORM EGG COUNTS	286
10.2.4 PASTURE COLLECTION AND PASTURE LARVAL COUNTS.....	286
10.2.5 MODIFIED STRONGYLID LARVAE RECOVERY PROCEDURE	287

10.2.6 DNA EXTRACTION	290
10.2.7 STRONGYLID SPECIES qPCR AMPLIFICATION	290
10.2.8 PCR AMPLIFICATION.....	291
10.2.9 SEQUENCE ANALYSIS	292
10.2.10 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS.....	294
10.3 RESULTS	296
10.3.1 INTERNAL PARASITES PREVALENCES IN EWES AND LAMBS	296
10.3.2 PROTOZOAN SPECIES AND GENOTYPES.....	302
10.3.3 LEVELS OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN qPCR AND MCMASTER WEC RESULTS	307
10.3.4 INTERNAL PARASITES RECOVERED FROM THE ENVIRONMENT OF EACH FLOCK.....	307
10.3.5 LEVELS OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN qPCR AND PASTURE LARVAE COUNT RESULTS	314
10.3.6 BETWEEN FLOCK ANALYSES – PRODUCTION PERFORMANCES AND FAECAL ATTRIBUTES IN LAMBS WITH DIFFERENT NATURAL LARVAL CHALLENGE	316
10.3.6.1 Hot carcase weight and dressing percentage	316
10.3.6.2 Growth rate, live weight and BCS	316
10.3.6.3 Faecal consistency score, FDM% and breech fleece faecal soiling score	317
10.3.7 WITHIN FLOCK ANALYSES – RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARASITES AND COMPARING CARCASE PRODUCTION PERFORMANCES	318
10.4 DISCUSSION	320
10.4.1 STRONGYLIDS AND LAMB PRODUCTION PERFORMANCES.....	321
10.4.2 PROTOZOA AND LAMB PRODUCTION PERFORMANCES	323
10.4.3 PROTOZOA PREVALENCE IN SHEEP AND DAM WATER.....	325
10.4.4 MODIFIED MOLECULAR TECHNIQUE FOR RECOVERING STRONGYLID LARVAE FROM PASTURES.....	326
10.4.5 MOLECULAR TECHNIQUE FOR IDENTIFYING STRONGYLID INFECTIONS IN SHEEP	328
10.5 CONCLUSION.....	329
CHAPTER 11: GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	331

11.1 DISCUSSION	331
11.1.1 ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN PHENOTYPIC PRODUCTION PERFORMANCE TRAITS AND THE DETECTION OF PARASITES USING MOLECULAR TECHNIQUES	331
11.1.2 ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN PHENOTYPIC FAECAL TRAITS AND MOLECULAR PARASITE DETECTION	335
11.1.3 INTERNAL PARASITE EPIDEMIOLOGY AND PUBLIC HEALTH RISKS..	337
11.1.4 COMPARING MOLECULAR AND TRADITIONAL METHODS FOR THE DETECTION OF INTERNAL PARASITES	340
11.2 FUTURE WORK	341
11.3 CONCLUSIONS	345
CHAPTER 12: REFERENCES	347
CHAPTER 13: APPENDICES	414
13.1 APPENDIX ONE: QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY.....	414
13.2 APPENDIX TWO: MODIFICATIONS TO FAECAL DNA EXTRACTION	419
13.3 APPENDIX THREE: STRONGYLID SPECIES SPECIFIC PRIMERS	422
13.4 APPENDIX FOUR: SPIKE ANALYSES AND PCR ASSAY MINIMUM DETECTION LIMITS	423
13.5 APPENDIX FIVE: qPCR RESULTS.....	427
13.5.1 <i>CRYPTOSPORIDIUM PARVUM</i> DIAGNOSTIC LOCUS.....	427
13.5.2 qPCR FOR STRONGYLID SPECIES DETECTION	428
13.6 APPENDIX SIX: SHEEP GENOTYPE I SEQUENCES	429
13.6.1 18S rRNA:.....	429
13.6.2 ACTIN:.....	429
13.6.3 ACTIN PROTEIN SEQUENCE:	430

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Taxonomic and genus species of strongylidea worms in sheep (Lichtenfels and Hoberg, 1993).....	18
Table 2.2: Classes of broad spectrum anthelmintics and resistance prevalence in Australian sheep (Adapted from Coles <i>et al.</i> 2006; Kaminsky <i>et al.</i> 2008a; Hosking <i>et al.</i> 2009).	33
Table 2.3: Genetic genotypes of <i>G. duodenalis</i>	51
Table 2.4: The major bacteria associated with diarrhoea and production losses in extensively grazed lambs.	70
Table 3.1: Sampling locations and farm information for chosen meat lamb enterprises.	82
Table 3.2: Criteria used in assessment of faecal consistency score (FCS).	85
Table 3.3: Specific forward primers used with the reverse primer (NC2) to detect patent strongylid infections by PCR.	105
Table 4.1: Meat lamb farm information from survey respondents across different agricultural zones in Western Australia.....	121
Table 4.2: Survey replies from meat lamb farms by agricultural zones, with diarrhoea prevalence and proportion of their lamb flocks that experienced active or recent evidence of diarrhoea.	122
Table 4.3: Univariable associations between management practices with the risk of diarrhoea in meat lamb farms from Western Australia.	123
Table 4.4: Binary logistic regression model of management factors associated with the risk of active diarrhoea in meat lamb flocks in Western Australia.....	125

Table 4.5: Farmer responses towards different diarrhoea scenarios, whereby 5%, 25% and 50% of a meat lamb flock had active diarrhoea or evidence of recent diarrhoea (n=139 responses).....127

Table 5.1: Comparison of spiked positives (n=96) and negative samples (n=96) by PCR strongylid nematode diagnostic assays.141

Table 5.2: Comparison of the McMaster WEC (microscopy) and PCR diagnostic assays for the identification of strongylid positive or negative faecal samples.142

Table 5.3: Comparison of McMaster WEC (microscopy) and PCR diagnostic assays for the detection of patent strongylid infections in four lambs flocks.144

Table 6.1: Faecal sampling occasions, lamb age and day of study.157

Table 6.2: Stepwise procedures, DNA extraction kits and purpose of the different methods utilised to extract genomic DNA from strongylid L₃ and faecal samples.159

Table 6.3: Minimum amount of genomic DNA extracted directly from faeces, which specific amplification of the ITS-2 region could be achieved using the individual primer sets shown in parenthesis.164

Table 6.4: Strongylid species prevalences and 95% confidence intervals in meat lambs on two farms in southern WA.....165

Table 7.1: Protozoan prevalence and 95% confidence intervals detected by PCR for pregnant ewes on two farms in WA.185

Table 7.2: The number of samplings that individually indentified meat lambs tested positive to *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia* or both these parasites, at each of the two farms in WA.186

Table 7.3: Protozoan prevalence and 95% confidence intervals detected by PCR from meat lambs on two farms in WA.187

Table 7.4: Number of different species and genotypes of <i>Cryptosporidium</i> in growing lambs on two Western Australian farms.	195
Table 7.5: Number of <i>Cryptosporidium</i> isolates identified at respective loci from lambs on each farm.....	196
Table 7.6: Number of different assemblages of <i>Giardia</i> in growing lambs on two WA farms.	206
Table 7.7: Number of <i>Giardia</i> isolates identified at respective loci from lambs on each farm.	206
Table 8.1: Internal parasite prevalence (95% confidence interval) and average faecal worm egg count (WECs) for each lamb flock.	227
Table 8.2: <i>Cryptosporidium</i> and <i>Giardia</i> species/genotypes isolated from two lamb flocks in Western Australia.	228
Table 8.3: Relationships between parasites and growth rate with univariable analyses and general linear regression model (GLRM) analysis.	232
Table 8.4: Relationships between parasites and live weight with univariable analyses and general linear regression model (GLRM) analysis.	234
Table 8.5: Risk of non-pelleted faeces (faecal consistency score [FCS] \geq 3.0) in association with protozoan parasites.....	236
Table 8.6: Relationships between parasites and faecal consistency score (FCS) with univariable analyses and general linear regression model (GLRM) analysis.....	237
Table 8.7: Relationships between parasites and faecal dry matter percentage (FDM%) with univariable analyses and general linear regression model (GLRM) analysis.....	239

Table 9.1: Number of lambs positive for *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia*, *Eimeria* and *Campylobacter jejuni* pathogens, along with average worm egg counts (WECs) on the two farms.....257

Table 9.2: Associations between the detection of *Cryptosporidium* or *Giardia* at least once with hot carcass weight (HCW) and dressing percentage (%)......260

Table 9.3: Associations between *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia* or both detection frequencies in lamb faeces collected across all five sampling occasions with carcass productivity slaughter (mean ± standard error).261

Table 9.4: General linear model analysis of significant (P<0.100) interactions identified between *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia*, and *Eimeria* for different production and faecal attributes.....262

Table 9.5: Associations between detection of *Cryptosporidium* or *Giardia* in lamb faeces with live weights at each of the five sampling occasions.264

Table 9.6: Associations between detection of *Cryptosporidium* or *Giardia* in lamb faeces with live weights at each of the five sampling occasions.266

Table 9.7: Risk of non-pelleted faeces (faecal consistency score [FCS] ≥ 3.0) in sheep positive for protozoa parasites and correlation between adjusted worm egg count (WEC) and FCS.268

Table 10.1: Lamb age and feed on offer (FOO, kg of dry matter/hectare) on eight faecal sampling occasions.282

Table 10.2: Chemical analysis of pasture quality.....282

Table 10.3: Internal parasite flock prevalences by qPCR (95% CI), WEC and FCS average and ranges for the pregnant ewe flocks.....298

Table 10.4: Internal parasite prevalences (95% CI), along with levels of agreement between McMaster WEC and qPCR results.	300
Table 10.5: Arithmetic mean, adjusted strongylid faecal worm egg counts (WECs) for each lamb flock.	301
Table 10.6: Pasture larval count results and qPCR results from modified strongylid larvae recovery procedure.....	313
Table 10.7: Mean production attributes (hot carcass weight, dressing percentage, live weight, growth rate and body condition score) for each lamb flock.	317
Table 10.8: Mean faecal attributes (faecal consistency score [FCS] and faecal dry matter percentage [FDM%]) for each lamb flock.....	318
Table 10.9: Associations/correlations between <i>Cryptosporidium</i> and <i>Giardia</i> detection, along with adjusted, log-transformed WEC with carcass attributes for each flock.	320

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Merino sheep showing varying degrees of breech fleece faecal soiling at the breech ('perianal') area.....	3
Figure 2.1: Australian lamb production (in thousands of tonnes of carcase weight) and average lamb carcase weight (kg/lamb) (Athas 2011).....	9
Figure 2.2: Index of real commodity prices for lamb, beef, wheat and wool in Australia (ABARE 2010).....	9
Figure 2.3: Left – Domestic lamb consumption (in thousands of tonnes of carcase weight) and retail market price (average cents/kg retail weight). Right – Australian lamb meat exports (in thousands of tonnes of shipped weight) and percentage of lamb production (Athas 2011).....	10
Figure 2.4: Demographic changes of the Australian sheep flock (ABARE 2010).	11
Figure 2.5: National cost of endemic diseases to the sheep industry; control costs (expenses) and production losses (reduced income) (Sackett <i>et al.</i> , 2006).	13
Figure 2.6: Life cycles of strongylid nematodes (Woodgate, 2005; Hobbs <i>et al.</i> , 2007).	20
Figure 2.7: Schematic representation indicating the effect of strongylid worms on nutrient (protein) partitioning in sheep (ME preferentially utilised by the alimentary tract for its maintenance and the local immune response as evoked by worm infections, which occurs at the expense of peripheral tissues [meat, wool, skeleton and milk]) (Coop and Sykes, 2002).	29
Figure 2.8: Diagrammatic representation of the life cycle of <i>Cryptosporidium</i> in the mucosal epithelium of an infected mammalian host (Thompson <i>et al.</i> , 2005).....	43

Figure 2.9: Diagrammatic representation of the life cycle of <i>Giardia</i> spp. of an infected mammalian host. Adapted from Binz (1996) and Hobbs <i>et al.</i> , (2007).	53
Figure 2.10: Left – An electronic microscope image of the fine structure of a <i>Giardia</i> cyst in vivo, Right – The ventral surface of a <i>Giardia</i> trophozoite (Binz, 1996).	55
Figure 2.11: Left – Diagrammatic representation of the life cycle of <i>Eimeria</i> in an infected mammal. Right – Illustration of a sporulated oocyst (a), sporocyst (b) and sporozoite (c) of <i>Eimeria</i> . Adapted from Entzeroth <i>et al.</i> , (1998), Sam-Yellowe (1996) and Lindsay and Tood (1993).	66
Figure 3.1: Agricultural zones, location of the sheep properties sampled during this project, along with the locations of Fletchers International, Narrogin Hillside Tender Meats and Tammin Abattoir, the commercial abattoirs lambs were sent for slaughter.....	83
Figure 3.2: Graphical representation of differing faecal consistency scores (FCSs) (Dalton, 2006).	86
Figure 3.3: Graphical representation of the breech fleece faecal soiling scale (Australian Wool Innovation <i>et al.</i> , 2007).	88
Figure 3.4: Common sheep WEC parasites eggs and oocysts.....	90
Figure 4.1: Quantum Geographical Information System Distribution of meat lamb farm enterprises surveyed (red star labels) in the southern Western Australia.....	117
Figure 4.2: Annual rainfall decile ranges across southern Western Australia from January 1 st to December 31 st 2010 (Australian Bureau of Meterology, 2011a).	129
Figure 5.1: Methodology utilised to screen PCR positive controls [A], spiked and unspiked ewe control faecal samples [B] and on-farm lamb test samples [C].....	139
Figure 5.2: Number of lambs PCR-positive for each of the five strongylid species.....	145

Figure 5.3: Strongylid nematode genera identified by larval culture differentiation from pooled faecal samples.145

Figure 5.4: Number of strongylid species identified per lamb by PCR.146

Figure 6.1: The number of positive samplings that lambs tested positive for each strongylid species, at the two farms in Western Australia.167

Figure 6.2: Proportions of lambs with different numbers of strongylid species detected by PCR for each farm located in southern Western Australia.....168

Figure 7.1: Farm A meat lamb flock river/creek water source.....181

Figure 7.2: Top – Farm B meat lamb flock dam water source during winter. Bottom – Same water summer.181

Figure 7.3: *Cryptosporidium* prevalence on both farms at each of the five sampling occasions (95% CI indicated by standard error bars).189

Figure 7.4: Average prevalence of pre- (3 samplings) and post-weaning lambs (2 samplings) positive for *Cryptosporidium* on each farm (95% CI indicated by standard error bars).190

Figure 7.5: Average percentage prevalence of young lambs (first two samplings; lambs two months of age and younger) and old lambs (final three samplings) positive for *Cryptosporidium* on each farm (95% CI indicated by standard error bars).190

Figure 7.6: Average percentage prevalence of lambs on-farm (4 samplings) and lairage (1 sampling) positive for *Cryptosporidium* on each farm (95% CI indicated by standard error bars).191

Figure 7.7: Prevalence of the different *Cryptosporidium* species/genotypes isolated from lambs at each individual sampling occasion for each farm.197

Figure 7.8: Prevalence of the different *Cryptosporidium* species/genotypes in pre (first three samplings) and post-weaned (last two samplings) lambs from both farms in southern WA.....198

Figure 7.9: Prevalence of the different *Cryptosporidium* species/genotypes in young (first two samplings) and old (last three samplings) lambs from both farms in southern WA. ...198

Figure 7.10: Phylogenetic relationships of *Cryptosporidium* species and genotypes isolated from lambs in southern Western Australia, with some known *Cryptosporidium* species and genotypes, as inferred by Neighbour-joining analysis of Kimura’s distances calculated from pair-wise comparisons of partial (~540bp) 18S rRNA gene sequences. Percentage bootstrap values (>50%) from 1000 pseudoreplicates are shown for both the Neighbour-joining (first value) and maximum-parsimony (second value) analyses. ns = node with bootstrap value <50%.....200

Figure 7.11: Phylogenetic relationships of *Cryptosporidium* species and genotypes isolated from lambs in southern Western Australia, with some known *Cryptosporidium* species and genotypes, as inferred by Neighbour-joining analysis of Kimura’s distances calculated from pair-wise comparisons of partial (~830bp) actin gene sequences. Percentage bootstrap values (>50%) from 1000 pseudoreplicates are shown for both the Neighbour-joining (first value) and maximum-parsimony (second value) analyses. ns = node with bootstrap value <50%.201

Figure 7.12: *Giardia* prevalence on both farms at each of the five sampling occasions (95% CI indicated by standard error bars).202

Figure 7.13: Average prevalence of pre- (3 samplings) and post-weaning lambs (2 samplings) positive for *Giardia* on each farm (95% CI indicated by standard error bars). 203

Figure 7.14: Average prevalence of young lambs (2 samplings) and old lambs (3 samplings) positive for *Giardia* on each farm (95% CI indicated by standard error bars). 203
.....204

Figure 7.15: Average percentage prevalence of lambs on-farm (4 samplings) and lairage (1 sampling) positive for *Giardia* on each farm (95% CI indicated by standard error bars). ...204

Figure 7.16: Prevalence of the different *Giardia* assemblages isolated from lambs at each individual sampling occasion for both farms.207

Figure 7.17: Prevalence of the different *Giardia* assemblages in pre and post-weaned lambs from two farms in the south west of Western Australia.208

Figure 7.18: Prevalence of the different *Giardia* assemblages in pre and post-weaned lambs from two farms in the south west of Western Australia.208

Figure 7.19: Phylogenetic relationships of *Giardia duodenalis* assemblages isolated from lambs in southern Western Australia, with some known assemblages, as inferred by Neighbour-joining analysis of Kimura’s distances calculated from pair-wise comparisons of partial (~480bp) *glutamate dehydrogenase*. Percentage bootstrap values (>50%) from 1000 pseudoreplicate are shown for both the Neighbour-joining (first value) and maximum likelihood (second value) analyses. ns = node with bootstrap value <50%.209

Figure 7.20: Prevalence of *Eimeria* detected by microscopy in lambs of different ages from both farms.....211

Figure 8.1: Phylogenetic relationships of *Cryptosporidium* species and genotypes isolated from lambs in southern Western Australia, with some known *Cryptosporidium* species and genotypes, as inferred by Neighbour-joining analysis of Kimura’s distances calculated from pair-wise comparisons of partial (~540bp) 18S rRNA gene (A) and (~830bp) actin gene (B) sequences. Percentage bootstrap values (>50%) from 1000 pseudoreplicate are shown for

both the Neighbour-joining (first value) and maximum likelihood (second value) analyses.
.....229

Figure 8.2: Phylogenetic relationships of *Giardia duodenalis* assemblages isolated from lambs in southern Western Australia, with some known assemblages, as inferred by Neighbour-joining analysis of Kimura’s distances calculated from pair-wise comparisons of partial (~480bp) *glutamate dehydrogenase* (A) and (~511bp) β -Giardin (B). Percentage bootstrap values (>50%) from 1000 pseudoreplicate are shown for both the Neighbour-joining (first value) and maximum likelihood (second value) analyses. ns = node with bootstrap value <50%.230

Figure 8.3: The frequency of lambs with respective total numbers of internal parasite genera (*Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia* and strongylid nematodes) detected per lamb for the Boyup Brook (left) and Kojonup (right) flocks.231

Figure 8.4: The mean body condition score (BCS) \pm SEM for lambs with different numbers of internal parasite genera (strongylid nematodes, *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*) detected per lamb.....235

Figure 10.1: Illustrations of varying feed on offer (FOO) at the nine different pasture samplings.283

Figure 10.2: Graphical diagram of the pasture washer utilised to recover strongylid larvae for the modified strongylid larvae recovery procedure.289

Figure 10.3: Number of strongylid species detected by qPCR per lamb at each respective sampling (A), proportions of lambs with different numbers of strongylid species detected by qPCR at each sampling occasion (B) and correlations between cycle threshold (C_q) and adjusted, log transformed WEC for animals with a single strongylid species infection (C).
.....302

Figure 10.4: *Cryptosporidium* (A and B) and *Giardia* (C and D) species/genotypes detected in lambs at each of the five sampling occasions for Flocks S and L.304

Figure 10.5: Phylogenetic relationships of *Cryptosporidium* species and genotypes isolated from lambs in southern Western Australia, with some known *Cryptosporidium* species and genotypes, as inferred by Neighbour-joining analysis of Kimura’s distances calculated from pair-wise comparisons of partial (~540bp) 18S rRNA gene (A). Percentage bootstrap values (>50%) from 1000 pseudoreplicate are shown for both the Neighbour-joining (first value) and maximum likelihood (second value) analyses. ns = node with bootstrap value <50%.305

Figure 10.6: Phylogenetic relationships of *Giardia duodenalis* assemblages isolated from lambs in southern Western Australia, with some known assemblages, as inferred by Neighbour-joining analysis of Kimura’s distances calculated from pair-wise comparisons of partial (~480bp) *glutamate dehydrogenase* (B). Percentage bootstrap values (>50%) from 1000 pseudoreplicate are shown for both the Neighbour-joining (first value) and maximum likelihood (second value) analyses. ns = node with bootstrap value <50%.306

Figure 10.7: Strongylid species pasture larval counts (larvae/kg pasture DM) for each paddock (S and L).310

Figure 10.8: Dam water sourced by Flock S grazing Paddock S.311

Figure 10.9: Trough water sourced by Flock L grazing Paddock L. Water was supplied to troughs from a dam by an underground piping system.312

Figure 10.10: Comparison of cycle threshold (C_q) values in qPCR with pasture larval count numbers (larvae/kg of dry matter) for *Trichostrongylus* spp. (A) or *T. circumcincta* (B). PCR amplification was from genomic DNA extracted from material caught following the modified strongylid larvae recovery procedure for pastures spiked with known quantities of strongylid

species larvae (closed diamond), or pasture samples collected from field Paddock S and L (closed square).....315

Figure 13.1: Graphical representation of the Power Soil DNA Isolation Kit methodology. 421

Figure 13.2: Alignment of 5.8S, ITS-2 and partial 28S nuclear ribosomal DNA sequences, and location (grey) of individual forward primers (HAE, TEL, TRI, CHO, OEV), designed to the ITS-2 and evaluated in silico for specificity. Primer NC2 (reverse) is located in the 5' region of the 28S rRNA gene. Polymorphic positions indicated with International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) codes (Bott *et al.*, 2009).....422

Figure 13.3: *Cryptosporidium* spike analysis, PCR products from multiple *Cryptosporidium* species isolated at the 18S rRNA gene (~540bp). *C. hominis*, *C. parvum*, *C. melagridis*, *C. ubiquitum*, *C. felis*, *C. xiaoi*, *C. canis*, *C. suis*, *C. baileyi*, *C. wriairi*, *C. ryanae*, *C. andersoni* and *C. bovis* spiked samples (lanes 1 – 14) and negative control (lane 15) on a 1.0% agarose gel stained with SYBR® Safe DNA stain (Invitrogen, USA).....423

Figure 13.4: *Cryptosporidium* spike analysis, PCR products from multiple *Cryptosporidium* species isolated at the actin gene (~830bp). *C. hominis*, *C. parvum*, *C. ubiquitum*, *C. xiaoi*, *C. suis*, *C. baileyi*, *C. andersoni* and *C. bovis* spiked samples (lanes 1 – 8) and negative control (lane 9) on a 1.0% agarose gel stained with SYBR® Safe DNA stain (Invitrogen, USA).....423

Figure 13.5: *Giardia duodenalis* spike analysis, PCR products from multiple *Giardia* assemblages isolated at the *gdh* gene (~830bp). Assemblages A, B, C, D, E, F and G spiked samples (lanes 1 – 7) and negative control (lane 8) on a 1.0% agarose gel stained with SYBR® Safe DNA stain (Invitrogen, USA).424

Figure 13.6: *Giardia duodenalis* spike analysis, PCR products from multiple *Giardia* assemblages isolated at the β -*Giardin* gene (~511bp). Assemblages A, B, C, D, E and F

spiked samples (lanes 1 – 6) and negative control (lane 7) on a 1.0% agarose gel stained with SYBR® Safe DNA stain (Invitrogen, USA).424

Figure 13.7: Example of serial dilutions to determine the minimum amount of DNA for successful PCR amplification for (*Trichostrongylus* spp.) minimum DNA detection limit by PCR, PCR products at the IT-S nuclear rDNA gene (~268bp). Varying genomic DNA/μL concentrations 10,000, 5000, 1000, 500, 100, 50, 25, 15, 10, 5, 2, 1 and 0.1 pg/μL (lanes 1 – 13) on a 1.0% agarose gel stained with SYBR® Safe DNA stain (Invitrogen, USA).....425

Figure 13.8: *Salmonella* spike analysis, PCR products isolated at the *ompF* gene (~578bp). Spike samples (lanes 1 – 10), negative control (lane 11) and positive control (lane 12) on a 1.0% agarose gel stained with SYBR® Safe DNA stain (Invitrogen, USA).....425

Figure 13.9: *Campylobacter jejuni* spike analysis, PCR products isolated at the 16S rRNA gene (~287bp). Spike samples (lanes 1 – 14) and negative control (lane 15) on a 1.0% agarose gel stained with SYBR® Safe DNA stain (Invitrogen, USA).....426

Figure 13.10: qPCR analysis for confirmation of mixed *Cryptosporidium* species infections at the diagnostic locus (unique *Cryptosporidium*-specific protein coding gene) showing samples identified as *C. parvum* positive (Morgan-Ryan *et al.*, 1997; Yang *et al.*, 2009).427

Figure 13.11: qPCR analysis for detection of *Teladorsagia circumcincta* at the ITS-2 gene. The DNA was extracted directly from lamb faeces and material recovered from the modified pasture larvae recovery procedure.....428

LIST OF EQUATIONS

Equation 3.1: Faecal dry matter percentage (FDM%) calculation from fresh faecal samples.
.....87

Equation 3.2: Determining the WEC epg for faecal samples.89

Equation 3.3: Determining the WEC epg for faecal samples less than 2 g in weight.....89

Equation 3.4: Adjusting WEC for varying faecal consistency score (FCS) (Le Jambre *et al.*,
2007).91