

# USDA destroys three sheep flocks with scrapie infection

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Department of Agriculture officials said two sheep flocks in Wisconsin and one in Virginia — totaling 250 sheep — have been destroyed to stop the spread of scrapie, a slow-acting but invariably fatal disease of sheep and goats.

Dr. Jack R. Pitcher, a veterinarian with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, said the two flocks in Wisconsin were located by USDA veterinarians while they were tracing the movement of sheep into and out of another flock that had been found infected. The Virginia flock was destroyed because scrapie was recently diagnosed in tissue from a dead ram.

"In Wisconsin, USDA officials learned that an infected ram had been purchased from a flock that had been found infected and was destroyed last July near Janesville in Rock County," Pitcher said. "The USDA found the owner had also sold sheep to a person near Custer, in Portage County, Wis. That sale included a ewe that was twin to the originally infected ram."

The veterinarians found definite evidence of scrapie infection at the Portage county farm, thereby linking all three premises as part of the same scrapie outbreak, Pitcher said.

"To stop the outbreak, officials ordered the flocks in Rock and Portage Counties destroyed," he

said. "There were 50 sheep in Rock County and 100 in Portage in the two flocks. Owners were paid indemnities to compensate for their losses."

In Warren County, Va., a flock of 100 sheep and three goats was destroyed because scrapie was diagnosed in a ram that died about two years earlier.

"Normally, this diagnosis would have been made promptly through a microscopic examination of the ram's brain tissues," Pitcher said. "However, the tissues had been damaged by freezing before they arrived at the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's National Veterinary Service

Laboratories at Ames, Iowa. Laboratory scientists had to attempt to culture the virus in live mice, wait for the mice to die, and then examine their brain tissues with a microscope. This took two years."

Scrapie attacks the central nervous system of the sheep and goats. It may take months, or even years, before clinical symptoms appear. During that time the disease may be spread to other flocks when infected animals are bought and sold.

"An essential part of USDA's scrapie eradication program is intensive tracing of animal movements and monitoring

suspected flocks," Pitcher said.

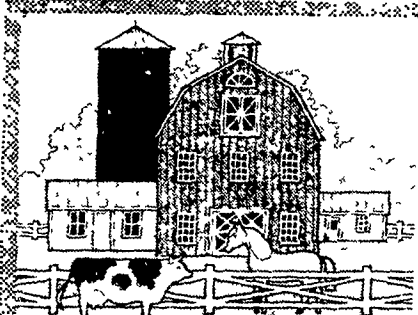
Affected animals may constantly rub against fixed objects, apparently to relieve intense itching. This leaves the skin raw and bare of wool. Animals may also show a lack of coordination, and their general physical condition degenerates, Pitcher said.



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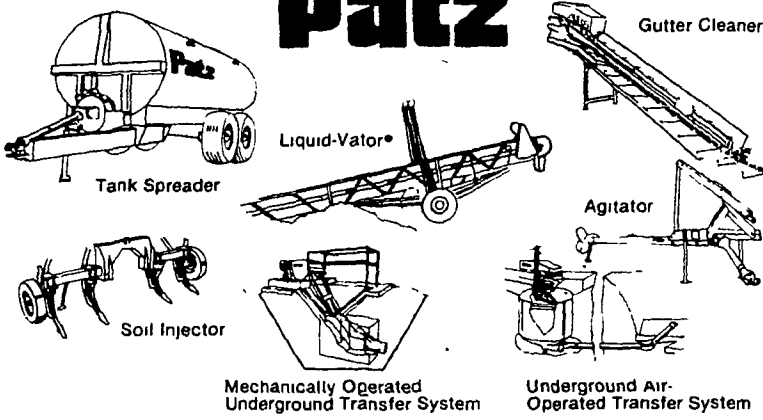
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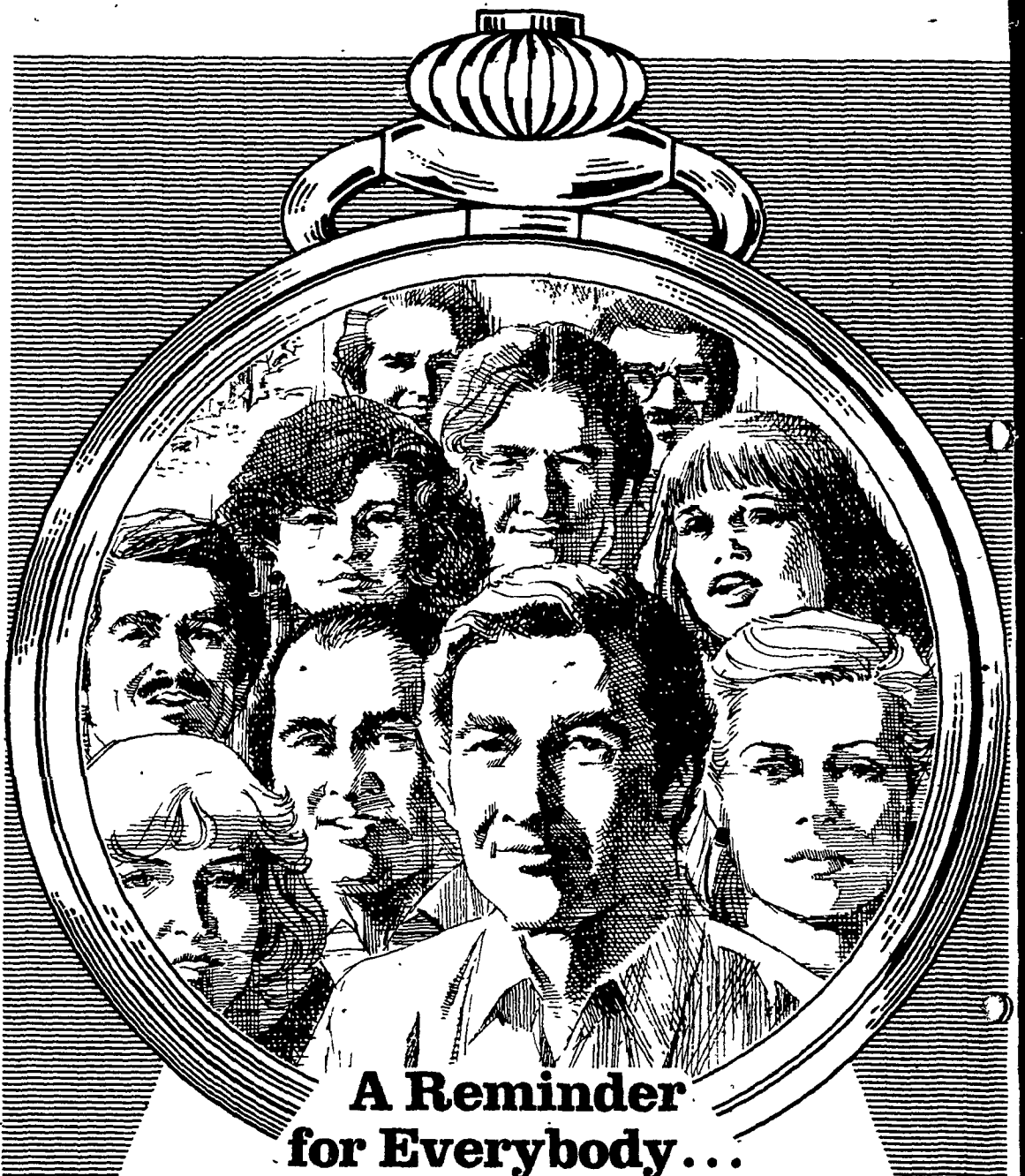
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