

# Media Release

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## **Native plants could be the panacea to cure sheep stomach aches**

Chemical properties in some native plants have the ability to stop sheep suffering from a debilitating stomach condition known as lactic acidosis.

Research by Peter Hutton, a recent University of Western Australia PhD graduate funded by the Future Farm Industries CRC, has shown that some native plants may have the right chemical properties to replace antibiotic feed supplements that reduce lactic acidosis in sheep.

“Unlike the common stomach aches humans suffer from, lactic acidosis is a serious illness in sheep caused by the bacterial break down of cereal grains to produce lactic acid, which can cause a severe decline in animal health and death if left untreated.”

“Traditionally, acidosis has been controlled through the inclusion of antibiotics in grain feed. However, Australia, like the Europe Union, will soon ban these supplements as their prolonged use can create resistant bacteria that could be passed on to humans,” Peter said.

“About 50 per cent of all antibiotics used in Australia are added to stock feeds which creates a substantial overhead for farmers.”

However, some Australian plants could offer a cheap, clean and green alternative to antibiotics because they contain chemical compounds that inhibit acidosis-causing bacteria.

Peter’s research is the first time that Australian plants have been tested for bioactive properties to prevent the condition.

“As part of my research, I created chemical extracts taken from native legumes and a selection of rangeland shrub species. These chemical extracts were tested on a range of bacteria known to cause lactic acidosis with up to five plants producing positive results,” Peter said.

“One of the plant extracts produced a level of acidosis protection comparable to the protection gained through the use of antibiotics.”

The fodder shrub *Acacia saligna* has also shown potential to protect against lactic acidosis.

“At this stage we have identified the chemical compounds in one plant that inhibits the acidosis-causing bacteria. Extracts from this plant have also been tested in animal feed trials to monitor its effectiveness inside a sheep’s stomach,” Peter said.

A high-resolution photograph of Peter on the farm can be downloaded from:  
<http://www.crcsalinity.com/images/upload/PeterHuttonandsheep.JPG>

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**Media Enquiries:** Greg Lawrence, T: 0429101 675 E: [greg.lawrence@futurefarmcrc.com.au](mailto:greg.lawrence@futurefarmcrc.com.au)  
Further information: [www.futurefarmcrc.com.au](http://www.futurefarmcrc.com.au)

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