

CUD

“Cows Under Discussion” or “Something to Chew On”



February 2016

Clinic News

The kids are back at school and the weather has finally come right! January's rain has most farms in a pretty good feed situation, with no hurry to get culls away, or drop milking frequency and the turnips are holding up well. And it's not even too cold in the mornings for those of us who aren't used to getting up pre-dawn, but find ourselves heading out pregnancy testing at this time of year.

Things are fairly stable on the farm staff front – Carol Adams at Milton and Sarah Morahan in Balclutha have taken to the preg-testing recording like ducks to water. The service we can provide is much more than “scanning the cows” – in Spring, the accuracy with which the results are recorded and cows are identified now, is just as important as an accurate, safe scanning job. Sarah Piwari will be leaving our front reception desk, and we will miss her friendly and efficient phone answering, call management and admin support.

Our friends the builders have now completely gutted the main floor of the Balclutha building “out the back”, including removal of over 120 tonnes of concrete rubble from the levelling of the floors. They are about to place the steel columns and beams that will support the new upstairs areas, then they can create the new small animal isolation ward, admin area & server room, RVM room and service areas. We hope to be in by May, but should have a couple of our new small meeting rooms available for milk quality reviews before that!

Is 16 hour milking the right choice?

Talking to farmers over the last few weeks there are a number who have decided to milk their herd every 16 hours. One of the main reasons given by farmers is that they are trying to conserve cow condition. So is 16 hour milking worth the crazy milking hours?

There is no trial data, that I am aware of, on the effects of 16 hour milking on cow condition, however there is quite a bit on once day milking (OAD). Cows put onto OAD milking in mid lactation for 3 months will gain about 0.5 of a body condition score more than those milked twice a day, providing they are well fed. Cows milked every 16 hours are basically milked 1.5 times per day so if we extrapolate the OAD data this would mean that cows milked every 16 hours for 3 months would gain 0.25 of a condition score more than those milked twice a day. If this is the case then it would seem that 16 hour milking only has a very small benefit in terms of gaining body condition. If we add to this the fact that some herds have been combined for ease of management then any gain due to reduced milking could be lost in the added social stress on the cows of being in a bigger mob.

All herds at this time of the year have a wide range in cow condition. While the average of the herd might be 4.3 there will still be a number of cows with a BCS of 3.0 or 3.5 and then lots of cows that are 4.5-5.5. Putting the very low BCS cows on 16 hour milking is only going to have a very small impact on their condition meaning that they are unlikely to gain enough condition to meet their target drying off BCS of 5.0-5.5. Putting the good condition cows onto 16 hour milking now will mean that they gain unneeded weight while probably limiting their milk production.

A better option which would lead to the same time in the milking shed each day, the right cows gaining more condition and possibly better milk production, might be to identify all the light cows and put these on OAD while continuing to milk the good condition cows twice a day. This strategy targets the reduced milking frequency to the right cows and allows flexibility with high SCC cows that can remain on twice a day. It also has the added benefit of reducing walking distance, leading to fewer lame cows.

Pregnancy Testing

Pregnancy testing is well under way this year. As usual the results are variable, however in general we are seeing improvements in 6-week in calf rates. Final scans on the herd and heifers can be done six weeks after the bull has been removed. Often for heifers, this means that we can only date the last 6-weeks of calving, but this information can still be very valuable, as these animals can be left at the run-off for longer at the end of winter, taking spring grazing pressure off the milking platform. Please give us a call if we haven't already booked in your pregnancy testing.

Risk of injury

It is important to remember every time something is inserted into an animal (natural or not), there is a risk of damage to the cow. From sticks up noses that cows put there themselves to vaginal haematomas caused by assertive bulls, injuries do happen. When pregnancy testing - be it with a scanner or an arm - there is a risk, however small, of perforating the rectum. The use of lubricant, and patience with straining cows, are some of the things we do to minimise the risk but the prompt identification and treatment of cows is critical. If you notice a sick cow soon after pregnancy testing by us, or by or a scanning outfit, please do not delay in calling us out for a look. The sooner she is seen the better her chances will be.

A study of Leptospirosis Vaccination in Dairy cattle

The Leptospirosis Research Group at Massey University are currently conducting a nationwide study on leptospirosis vaccination in dairy cattle, in which a number of our clients have agreed to participate. This study aims to improve control of Leptospirosis in dairy herds.

Throughout New Zealand blood, urine and bulk milk samples are being collected from 200 different herds and tested for Leptospirosis. In addition, information about vaccination practices and farm management on these farms is also being collected. Outcomes of the study will provide a better understanding of the current infection rates of Leptospirosis in dairy herds, the effectiveness of our current vaccination programmes, and better inform farmers and veterinarians on best practices for vaccination to reduce the risk to people.

Trace Elements for Calves

We are often all a little guilty of forgetting the young stock at this time of year once they are weaned and vaccinated and out on pasture. Young stock are the future of your herd and it is important to make sure they are growing well and reaching key target weights. So often when we talk growth rates in calves we look at their nutrition and how much pasture they are getting. As a component of this, trace elements such as copper and selenium can also influence how well animals are growing.

All calves should be given some form of copper in summer – ideally copper bullets, and all R2 heifers should receive either copper bullets or injections. Selenium should be supplemented in some form – long or short acting injections, through a dosatron system if grazing on the milking platform, or from prills on the pasture. If you are unsure of how your supplementation programme is going, blood testing a sample of the group can provide a cost effective way to check if additional supplementation is required.

Checklist for this month:

- Pregnancy testing - needs to be done now for accurate aging of the first few weeks of calving
- Lepto vaccination of calves, yearlings and herd
- Johne's testing on milk samples from herd testing, on herds with a known problem
- Careful management of cows on to summer turnips, to avoid photosensitivity issues
- Trace element supplementation of calves no longer getting mineral-treated water

Retail

The list for this month

- **Merial Ancare Cattle Drenches** - Purchase a 20lt of Matrix C; 2 x Eclipse E injection and Eclipse Pour-on 5 or 10lt and receive a Core vest.
- Purchase 4 x **Genesis injection**; 2 x **Genesis Injection + B12 & Selenium**; a 2.5lt of **Eclipse Pour-on**; or a 5lt of **Genesis Pour-on** and receive a Hi-Viz vest
- **Eprinex 5lt** - Buy 3 x 5lt and get the 4th FREE
- **Eclipse E Injection** - Buy 3 x 500ml and get the 4th FREE
- **Dectomax Injection** - Coming soon. Buy 4 x 500ml (2 Starter Packs) and receive a Victorinox Knife Set plus the bonus 2 x 200mls of Dectomax

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