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# CUD

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

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**November 2008**

Although it still seems pretty cold most days, the grass has taken off over much of the practice area, and if silage hasn't been cut yet, most people have a few paddocks locked up. The initial impression is that non-cycling cow numbers at PSM are up on “normal” years. This is probably a reflection of the difficult, wet winter – studies show that the single most important factor determining length of time from calving to first service is condition score at calving. That's why we are always banging on about drying off light cows early in the autumn!

Clinic News: Late October until the end of November is our overall busiest time of the year, with the planner booked full of reproductive work all day, every day. If the vets are looking a little jaded when they arrive at your place, please understand that we have probably been calf de-budding, metricechecking, CIDR-ing or PG-ing flat out for the last few weeks.

Unfortunately we will be saying farewell to two of our number in the New Year. Bernie will be moving on from the Milton branch, and Alisa from Balclutha. We are working hard to find replacements, and will be hanging out for the arrival back of Teresa (from maternity leave) and Sid (from his injury) in time for pregnancy testing. The arrival of a new full-time, permanent companion animal vet will also ease some of the “filling in” pressures on the dairy vet side.

Meanwhile, your board of directors continues the search for a suitable replacement for Bruce in the CEO role. “The only things certain in life are uncertainty and tax”.

## **Reproduction**

The advent of the “Metricheck” - that little scooper thingy that quickly checks cows for pus in the vagina - has really focused people on the number of dirty cows that can be lurking in the herd, and opened a few eyes to the extent of the problem. The downside is that it has made some people a little complacent about their “at risk cows” – those that are most likely to be dirty and can usually be identified within a fortnight of calving. Many people have neglected early, aggressive examination and attention to these at risk cows, in favour of a whole herd metricecheck before the start of mating.

What's the problem? Well, first the metrichecker has never been claimed to be a 100% accurate tool, and it can miss some dirty cows that then go untreated. A range of reproductive problems are more likely to be picked up by a proper vaginal and rectal examination. Second, because the job is being left much later, treatment of these dirty cows is much more difficult. Studies have shown that the longer the infection is in the uterus, the less likely it is that the antibiotic will cure it (exactly the same as with an undetected mastitis case), and that even if treatment is “successful” the damage done to the wall of the uterus by the chronic infection will greatly reduce that cow's fertility. Add to those the increased difficulty in passing the metricure pipette through a small, tightly closed cervix long after calving!

So what's the solution? First, continue to record “at risk cows” and get them thoroughly checked, in batches, a few weeks after they have calved. Second, if you wish to check the whole herd, do it in smaller groups, every few weeks, and get treatment in, *on time*. Everything that calves in the first fortnight can be checked by week five of calving, etc. It is really too late, a week before PSM, when cows aren't cycling, to expect the little doofer to work miracles on your herd!

**Teaser bulls** – there is some evidence that they may have a role in stimulating non-cycling cows, but we yet to see really robust, trial-based evidence of this. Check [www.side.org.nz](http://www.side.org.nz) (2008 papers) for details.

## **Mastitis Matters**

Although things are settling down now, it has been a difficult mastitis season on many farms. We see this mostly in the amount of money you are spending on intramammaries. We would rather see it in the number of times you ask us for advice about how to prevent, manage and eliminate the problem! If you are having ongoing mastitis issues – high BMSCC, or even cell count grades; more than 2 new cases of mastitis per week in a 500 cow herd; cows not responding to treatment – it is likely that there are issues relating to cow and milking management on the farm. Please phone and speak to us, so we can help you lower your antibiotics bill.

## **Young stock- Your Future**

**Calf drenching:** Calves will start picking up parasite worms from the grass, from the moment they are put outside to nibble it. If the same paddocks have been used for calf rearing / weaning year after year, the problem is likely to be even worse. The pastures will be more heavily contaminated with worms, and there is a risk that many of these worms will be drench resistant.

Calves may need to be drenched as soon as three weeks after they are put on grass, and the re-drenching interval depends on the “persistent activity” of the drench (ie does it just kill the worms in the calf at the time, leaving it open to re-infection from the next day; or does it go on killing in-coming worms for some time after it is used?), as well as paddock and calf factors. Have you considered spreading the calves thinly around the farm after weaning – this is an excellent strategy for minimizing worm intake. Combination drenches have been shown to slow the rate at which drench resistance develops. Please discuss a parasite management plan (not just drenching!) with a vet if you are in any doubt.

**Trace elements** may also need to be addressed. Copper, selenium and cobalt (vitamin B12) are all important, but there are no “recipes”. Many people give a copper bullet and a long acting selenium injection at weaning, and Vitamin B12 several times throughout the summer. Again, we are happy to help a tailor a plan that will meet your animals particular circumstances and requirements.

**Vaccinations.** Each year we see a few mobs of calves affected by pulpy kidney – usually the biggest and best calves suddenly dropping dead on lush green grass. To protect against this, a 5 in 1 vaccine can be used about now. It may also offer protection against blackleg, and some of the soil-borne conditions we see causing deaths in the winter; and it can be combined with Vitamin B12. Over the last year or so, debate has been raging in veterinary circles about the effectiveness of early (pre-Christmas) 7 in 1 (Lepto and 5 in 1 combined) calf vaccination. For now, it is probably best *not* to do it.

### **Things to do in November:**

Attend to non-cycling cows. Special attention to late calvers that were too freshly calved to treat at PSM. Get bulls (don't skimp on numbers). Have them blood tested for BVD and EBL, vaccinated for Lepto. Finish calf debudding, and plan a health programme for them for the summer. Assess herd test results (somatic cells) against age of cow and last season's mastitis/dry cow history. Identify cows not worth further treatment and add to cull list. Plan staff time off over Christmas / New Year.

The farmer had been ripped off so many times by the local car dealer that when the dealer wanted to buy a cow, the farmer priced it to him like this:

Basic cow, \$1800; two-tone exterior, \$100; extra stomachs \$300; product storage compartment, \$100; dispensing device, four spigots at \$50 each, \$200; genuine cowhide upholstery, \$125; dual horns, \$20; automatic fly swatter, \$50. Total = \$2695.

(take note, Ted!)

### **TAKE-A-MATE FISHING is BACK**

Our most popular promotion of the year is back on, with all Merial Ancare oral and pour-on drench purchases made before 21<sup>st</sup> December qualifying for an entry into the prize draw.

Enjoy two great days of fishing with BBQ lunches and refreshments on our Stewart Island charter, plus a night ashore being wined and dined.

Check our website for photos from last year's trip.

**Retail Direct Phone Line 4181281**