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# CUD

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

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**September 2008**

**The weather in the last few days seems to have taken a turn for the better, and in most areas the grass is at last beginning to dry out, even if it's not growing much yet. The Clutha Vets two wheel drive utes are even making it out across the paddocks to the cowside on a few occasions! It's about time really, with most people approaching (or past) the half-way point of calving.**

Clinic News: The Clutha Vets calving pattern remains tightly aligned to PSC, with some heifer replacements at last. Congratulations to Teresa and Matt on the arrival of Isobel; and to Bernie and Vanessa on the arrival of Belle. No chains, ropes, jacks or surgical kits were required in either case!

A new dairy farmer representative has been elected to the board of Clutha Vets. Stewart Morrison, of Inchclutha takes over from Lindsay Watt. Congratulations. You should feel free to discuss any queries you have about the governance of your vet club with Stewart, or any other board member.

Bruce Bissett, CEO of Clutha Vets, has announced he will be stepping down from the role he has held since 1984 at the end of this year. The board are doing a lot of “navel gazing” (hopefully through plenty of vetadine spray!) to determine the best way forward for the Club.

## Mastitis Matters

Clinical mastitis rates and the number of BMSCC grades seem to have been higher this season than normal. It is probably due to the very wet conditions which may have decreased cow immunity and increased environmental contamination (ie heavily used and therefore dirty calving pads, and muddy paddocks). Consistent with this, milk samples taken from mastitis cows that we have cultured after our grade-busting visits have grown mainly *Strep. uberis*, which is an environmental pathogen.

The good news is pre-calving teat-spraying may dramatically reduce the incidence of this type of mastitis (see CUD July 2008 on the Clutha Vets website). Also, these infections are normally easily cured with penicillin-based intramammaries. Intracillin now has a licence for up to six consecutive 12-hourly treatments, with the same 96 hour milk withholding. Recent evidence shows that duration of treatment is probably at least as important as which antibiotic you use, in determining the success of treating most clinical mastitis cases.

It is a good idea to use a rapid mastitis tester to look for high levels of subclinical mastitis in every quarter, before moving cows from the colostrum mob into the milkers. This doesn't necessarily mean treating all of those cows identified, but it may create some breathing space if your bulk count is high, or point to likely culprits if there are subsequent problems. Remember, milk remains positive on the RMT paddle for up to two weeks after the bugs have been killed, so if there are no clinical signs of mastitis after a course of treatment, there is probably no advantage in using more antibiotics.

## Reproduction – PSM is only 9 weeks away!

Once you've had a chance to get most of your calving records entered onto MINDA, have a look at your herd “Fertility Focus” report – it's a great way to measure your calving performance against agreed benchmarks, and is the starting point for making the improvements highlighted in the InCalf Project. Contact a vet for more advice and info if you would like to take InCalf further, and ramp up your herd's reproductive performance

**Health issue – Ketosis:** If cows are using more energy than they are taking in, their blood sugar levels fall, and they enter a state of “negative energy balance”. To rectify this they use their own body reserves of fat. The by-products of this are substances known as “ketone bodies”, which, combined with the low blood sugar, make the cow very weak, often 11.5

- Early lactation, when food intake can’t match demand, and heaps of the cows’ energy goes straight into the vat. Peak milk production occurs 4-6 weeks post calving, but peak dry matter intake does not occur until 8-10 weeks post calving. This syndrome is especially common in well-conditioned, high-producing cows, who don’t hesitate to mobilize their abundant fat reserves!
- Other diseases that lead to lower food intake (mastitis, displaced abomasum etc)
- Late pregnancy, especially with twins, when the foetus is both demanding a lot of the cows energy, and reducing the volume of food the rumen can process
- When feed quality is low (eg poor quality hay, straw or baleage are being eaten in favour of higher energy winter brassica crops)
- When energy demands from cold weather and wading through belly-deep mud are very high
- When any number of the above are combined

Some people can smell the ketones (like a marker pen) on the breath of affected animals. Also, simple blood tests can confirm ketosis in individual sick animals, or at a subclinical and production-limiting level in the herd.

Treatment of sick cows involves steroids to stimulate the metabolism and IV glucose to raise blood sugar levels.

**Metabolic bags explained:** The Bomag metabolic flexi packs that we stock for treating down cows come in a number of different “flavours”. They have different ingredients, for treating cows with different problems.

**Brown** (Glucalpos) is a good all-purpose bag. It contains calcium (for treating milk fever); magnesium (deficiencies are often associated with milk fever) and phosphorus (deficiency doesn’t normally cause a cow to go down, but can keep a cow down), and dextrose for energy. It can be given under the skin over the ribs (“subQ”) or slowly into the jugular vein (“IV”).

**Orange** (Calpro 250) contains calcium for treating milk fever, but no magnesium, phosphorus or dextrose. It does, however, have Vitamin B12, which helps stimulate metabolism and appetite. It is probably most appropriate to use this on “sick” downer cows, especially if they have been down for more than a day or two.

**Pink** (40% dextrose) are a source of energy only, and can be used for treating sick/ketosis cows, but are not suitable for milk fever, as they don’t contain calcium. They **must be given into the vein** (IV) – if they are put “over the ribs” than can cause large areas of skin death and infection.

**Dark blue** (20% Mag sulphate) should **never be given into the vein**. They are given under the skin (in combination with a mixed calcium/magnesium bag given IV) to cows with grass staggers (nervous, twitchy, convulsing or aggressive).

Unfortunately, the new “CalProPhos” bags (containing phosphorus and B12) have been so popular, nationwide stocks have run out, until next season!

Things to do in September:

- Calf disbudding, give the clinic a call if you have not already got them booked in.
- Metrichick groups of cows that are calved at least a fortnight – if you tail paint everything that has calved up until now, in two weeks time that group will be ready to check.
- Inductions – by the 7<sup>th</sup> Sept, it will be too late to induce anything due before 9<sup>th</sup> November. That’s after PSM!

A city man was roaring down the Clinton-Clydevale road when his car sputtered to a complete stop near a paddock of cows. The driver, getting out to see what was the matter, noticed one of the cows looking at him. "I believe it's your radiator," said the cow. The man nearly jumped right out of his city-slicker-britches! He ran to the nearest house and knocked on the door. "A cow just gave me advice about my car!" he shouted, waving his arms frantically back toward the field. The farmer nonchalantly leaned out beyond the door frame to glance down the paddock. "The cow with two big black spots on it?" the farmer asked slowly. "Yes! Yes! That's the one!" the excited man replied. "Oh. Well, that's 417" the farmer said, turning back to the man. "Don't pay any attention to her. She doesn't know a thing about cars."

#### **This Month's Retail News**

- Congratulations again to Stewart Morrison, this time for winning the 50-teat tow-along calf feeder by buying Headstart. Coincidence or crony-ism?
- Phil Neame won the weather station spot prize and Stephen Korteweg the Rumensin jacket and petrol vouchers, for supporting our Spring Supply Night.
- Milligan's calf powder \$93.96 inc
- Buy 2.5l **Genesis**, 2.5l **Eclipse** or 5l **Eprinex** pour-on, and receive a free pair of Muck Boots. No need for cold feet this Spring!

**Retail Direct Phone Line 4181281**