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

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Winter seems to have passed unremarkably for most farmers – we certainly have not been aware of stock health issues this year on anything like the scale they were last winter. Probably this has been due to cows being in better condition at drying off, and better and more crop to feed them. On the whole, cows around the district are now looking good, and this bodes well for an uneventful and high-producing spring.

Clinic News: We are getting geared up for the calving season, which for most of us is the highlight of the year. Now more than ever, we get the chance to put into practice all the things we learnt at vet school, to help solve your problems. Everyone is on board except Jason, who we expect back from Britain at the end of the month. It is great to have Sid on board at Milton, and his experience is already being utilised in a number of areas of the clinical workload.

The big news around the practice is that the Board has approved \$600,000 for the “makeover” of the Milton clinic. Despite the practice growing rapidly at the northern end, that building hasn’t had a major upgrade since it was purchased in ‘92, and really hasn’t been coping well for some time!

Mastitis Matters: One of the issues that may have been discussed at your PAR consultation, was the increased chance of successfully treating clinical mastitis *by treating for longer, rather than changing drugs when the first choice seems not to be working*. The major stumbling block for most drugs is the lack of knowledge about what using extra tubes does to the withholding period. This “extended therapy” has therefore attracted a lot of attention from the researchers and drug companies over the last couple of years. Mastitis drugs we prescribe that are currently licensed for more than 36 hours treatment (3 tubes at 12 hours apart) are:

Intracillin – one tube every twelve hours up to a total of six tubes; **Spectrazol** – one tube every twelve hours up to a total of eight tubes; **Ubro Yellow** – one tube every 24 hours up to a total of three tubes; **Nafpenzal**– one tube every 24 hours up to a total of three tubes; **Mastalone**– one tube every 24 hours up to a total of three tubes; **Orbenin LA** – one tube every 48 hours up to a total of three tubes; **Mamyzin** – inject 5g daily for up to 5 days; **Tylo 200** – inject once every 24hours for up to 5 days.

Remember, a cow may remain positive on the RMT paddle for up to a fortnight after her clinical mastitis is cured, so don’t rush in to extend treatment or re-treat these animals if there are no visible signs of clinical mastitis after treatment is finished.

If extending the duration of treatment does not cure the clinical mastitis, the best way to get a handle on the issue, is by culturing a milk sample from that quarter. For this reason, we recommend taking sterile samples from all mastitis cases early in the season (before the treatment is started). They can be labeled (cow number, quarter and date) and frozen for a few weeks, and examined later if necessary. This will provide information on the likely cause of the mastitis, its prevention and treatment. Sample pottles are available free from the clinics or depots.

Magnesium supplementation should begin at least three weeks before calving, so that there is time for the cow’s calcium metabolism to be “geared up” to protect against milk fever. Cows need 15g of magnesium down their throat each day. CausMag (mag oxide) is 55% magnesium, so they must eat 28g each. This amount should be increased (up to as much as 100g) to allow for wastage, if dusting; or decreased, if mag (chloride or sulphate) is also going through the water. It is easy to *over* supplement magnesium. If you are having metabolic problems at calving time, don’t just “up the mag” as this can

lead to even greater problems than under doing it! For more info on mag supplementation check out the August 2007 Dairy Farmer Newsletter on our website www.cluthavets.co.nz.

Nutrition: There are quite a number of “starter drenches” on the market. The theory behind them is great – the transition of a calving cow is not over when she calves, but carries on through the colostrum period until she is milking fully on a milker’s diet. By giving the cow a shot of energy, calcium and magnesium as she calves, we can guard against the milk fever and ketosis (often subclinical) that are associated with the measurable decrease in eating during the 24 hours either side of calving. Thus, instead of a downwards spiral of negative energy balance and weight loss, she spirals upwards and onwards to peak production and the mating season.

Although the products may look similar and make similar claims, they are not all the same. HeadStart (the original) has some significant differences from the more recent copies. Things as simple as the form of magnesium (chloride rather than oxide) or calcium (chloride rather than carbonate) greatly effect the cows ability to absorb and utilize these minerals. Energy should be supplied as propionate for immediate use, but also in a sustained release compound. Headstart is the only product with trial work that shows increased milk solid production for treated cows over untreated (8kg for the season). We believe Headstart is the premium starter drench

“At-Risk” Cows are those that are likely to be dirty (carry a uterine infection) after calving. They include cows known to have retained membranes or a smelly discharge; assisted calvings, induced, dead or twins; even mastitis cows and down cows.

The move in recent years to whole-herd metrichecking before the start of mating has taken some of the focus off recording, thoroughly examining and (if necessary) treating these animals 2-4 weeks post calving. The problem arises if cows that are picked up at metrichecking time have already been carrying an infection for many weeks by the time they are identified. By then both the chances of getting a cure, and avoiding any more lasting damage to the uterus wall are much slimmer. In other words, it may be too little, too late!

Some farmers identify their at-risk cows from the first fortnight of calving with coloured tail tape at the time they calve, and then change to a second colour for the next fortnight. By the end of the second fortnight it is time to check the first group, and so the pattern repeats itself.

Things to do in August:

Complete the consultation for your prescription drugs for the coming season (“PAR Consult”)

Get the cows calved and milking!

Inductions – Second shot for early group; first shot for later group (First shots for the early group should already be done).

Start your “At Risk Cow” list – any cow who has a high chance of carrying a post-calving uterine infection, that should be carefully checked out 3-4 weeks after calving.

Clutha Vets AGM (with Garry Waghorn from DairyNZ) 8pm, 25th August at Rosebank Lodge, Balclutha.

A farmer was calving a cow, when he noticed his four-year-old nephew, who had come to visit from the city, standing wide-eyed at the fence, soaking the whole event in. The man thought “Great. Now I have to explain the whole ‘birds and bees’ thing to my sister’s four-year-old townie son! No need to jump the gun, though, I’ll just let him ask the questions, and I’ll answer honestly”.

When everything was over, the man walked over to his nephew and said, “Well, boy, do you have any questions?”

“Just one” said the still wide-eyed lad. “How fast was that calf going when it hit the cow?”

This Month’s Retail News

Spring supply night was well supported, and we hope it provided a great opportunity for you to get free, independent, professional animal health advice. Amongst the lucky winners on the night were Mark & Kylie Watt (Inchclutha) the Virbac digital camera; Stephen & Judith Ray (Clydevale) the case of wine with BOMAC metabolic products; Scott & Collette Keenan (Wharetoa) the 12v Chilly Bin with Headstart.

There is a good range of offers and deals on all of the “mectin” drenches that many farmers use at calving to boost production and reproduction.

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