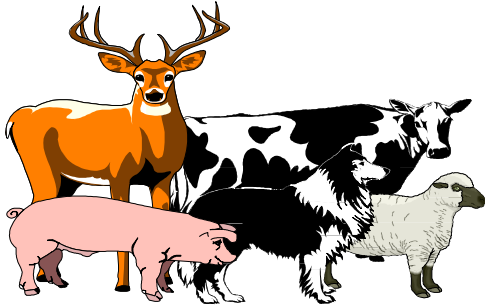


# Dairy Farmer Newsletter February 2008

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## **Practice News**

The hot dry weather has been great for those of us who work for salaries and get paid holidays, but is certainly putting the pressure on feed on many farms. This year more than ever summer turnips have been a saviour for many (see article inside), and plenty of silage is being fed out too. Some of our clients have dropped to 16hr milkings. Despite

this, a number of farmers have commented that cows are rapidly losing condition.

Paul Bonini (a Scotsman with an Italian name – he stuffs his cannelloni with haggis) has come on board in a new role as Practice Manager. He will help us generate greater administrative efficiencies, and leave vets more time to concentrate on clinical work; thus maintaining the strong financial performance of your Vet Club.

## Summer Turnips

There is a growing trend amongst South Otago dairy farmers to feed turnips as a summer supplement. They are part of the same brassica family as chou, kale and swedes, and can lead to a similar range of animal health issues. These include:

**Photosensitivity** – probably the most common problem encountered. Compounds naturally occurring in the turnips react with sunlight under the cow's skin (usually white patches, the udder and inside the thighs). This is intensely painful – the first sign may be that the cows are fidgety in the shed and resent the cups, udders are hot, cows kick at their belly (we are often called to a cow with a suspected twisted gut). In time the skin becomes raised, thickened, weeps (+/- infection) dies and peels.

These animals should be removed from the crop, and given a paddock with good shade. A cow cover may just provide further irritation. Filtabac cream applied to the affected areas acts as sunblock, and is antibacterial. Anecdotal evidence suggests drenching every couple of days with a good handful of mono zinc may help. Likewise, increasing daily zinc allowance to all cows up to 5g may help prevention. There is debate about the use of injectable drugs – anti-inflammatories may be dangerous if there is liver damage, steroids (potentially dangerous to pregnancy) or anti-histamine may help calm reactive skin, antibiotics are required if skin becomes infected. A blood test to assess liver damage may help predict long term prospects for the cow.

**Acidosis** – as with winter crop, a sudden change to low fibre, high sugar diet can cause the bugs in the gut to go mad, producing lactic acid in the rumen. The cows become dehydrated as the gut bloats with fluid and metabolic problems ensue, often leading to the cow going down. Early veterinary intervention (IV fluids) may help.

**Nitrate poisoning** – something we are commonly asked about, but seldom see. High use of nitrate fertiliser, diseased plants, cloudy weather, rapid growth during hot, humid weather, and *the breaking of* a dry spell, can all increase the risk of high nitrates in the plants, especially the stalks. Nitrate prevents the blood from carrying oxygen,

and acts very quickly. The symptoms proceed from gasping and rapid breathing through to muscle tremors, weakness, stumbling, collapse and death. If treated in time they can be reversed.

Clutha Vets offers an in-house test to assess the level of nitrates in crop (bring in a few leaves and stalks from different areas of the paddock), or you can get a test kit from us for your own ongoing monitoring.

There is a range of other less common health issues that may be associated with brassica feeding, including redwater (red urine, due to blood cell breakdown), and trace element & vitamin deficiencies.

The key to avoiding all of these problems is the gradual introduction of turnips as a small proportion of the diet, and ensuring adequate supplementary fibre. Exposure to any toxins is therefore gradual, and problems should become apparent before they become serious. Also, the microbes in the gut will have time to adjust to the new diet, and there will not be a sudden, massive over-proliferation of harmful bacteria. Initially at least, feed the turnips for a short period only, when the cows already have plenty of grass in the rumen (eg for a couple of hours around the middle of the day). Only increase from this amount when you have established that it is safe to proceed.

## Mastitis Matters

A number of people have been enquiring about treating subclinically infected cows, based on herd test results. In some ways this makes sense – the only difference between clinical and subclinical mastitis is how hard you have to look to find it(!), and if they were clinical, they would definitely be treated. However, the cost effectiveness of treating subclinical mastitis varies, depending on the BMSCC, stage of lactation, age and production of the cow, type of infection, antibiotics used, and duration of treatment. For example, three days on straight penicillin is unlikely to be successful (or cost effective) in an eight year old cow that has had a high cell count ever since a clinical case of mastitis last season, despite DCT at drying off last year! Please speak to a vet before treating high SCC cows, based purely on herd test results, to develop a plan that is likely to get the result you are seeking.

## Getting the Most From Pregnancy Testing

Pregnancy testing is a great opportunity to gather information about the success of your mating programme and to plan for the management of cows around calving. Using accurately dated pregnancies, you can establish your 6 or 8 week “In Calf Rate”. This is by far the best measure of reproductive performance of your herd – talking about “empty rate” really only indicates how late you left the bull out, and how many inductions you are prepared to do! The higher your 6 week ICR, the more compact and efficient your calving will be, the more days in milk you will get, and the more successful the next mating will be.

Some farmers like to identify cows into fortnightly calving groups to bring home from run offs and feed into the springer mob. Others like a distinction made between AI and bull mating calves. Inductions for the management of late calving cows will be available until the “Code” governing their use is reviewed in 2009. Pregnancy testing is the time to identify which cows to induce and when.

We can accurately age pregnancies from 30 days post conception to about 84 days. However young pregnancies can be missed (especially with a scanner) and there is a high rate of embryonic loss up until about 6 weeks. For these reasons we don't like to confirm any pregnancy much less than about 40 days, and a cow can't be definitively called “empty” if she's had contact with a bull within the last 6 weeks. It is inaccurate to be sorting calves into groups by age any more than 12 weeks after the mating date.

The best time to pregnancy test is therefore about 6-10 weeks after the mating date for the cut-off you want to identify:

To identify:	Preg test:
First fortnight	8-12 weeks after PSM
AI calves	6-10 weeks after end of AI
6 week ICR	12-16 weeks after PSM
Induction cows	6-10 weeks after last natural calvers mated
Empty cows	6 weeks after last bull contact.

At pregnancy testing time, make sure all results are clearly recorded against tag numbers on paper

(and remember to put this years date on it!). Make a copy, and keep one at the cow shed, and one at the house.

Of course, Clutha Vets are happy to tailor a pregnancy testing programme and do all of this with you. We can then use MINDA mating records, or our own computer program, to generate lists of which cows are which. Please speak to a vet now to sort out how you can use pregnancy testing as a powerful tool in your farm management. Don't just ask for “Pregnant”, “Late” and “Dry”.

## Lepto

Lepto is a serious (potentially fatal) disease that farm workers can catch from cattle that may not even appear sick. OSH has said it is an identifiable hazard on dairy farms that employers must take all practical steps to minimise. The best way to do this is via Leptosure, an accreditation scheme that covers all aspects of protecting staff from Lepto, including, (but not solely), vaccination of stock.

Now is the time to get vaccination of all cattle in contact with your dairy operation underway. Calves require two shots, 4 – 6 weeks apart. If calves have not already been vaccinated against pulpy kidney, black leg, tetanus etc (5 in 1, with, or without, selenium and vitamin B12), a 7 in 1 vaccine that combines lepto and those diseases can be used. Unfortunately, 7 in 1 is not available with selenium and B12. Replacement heifers require a booster shot within a year of the second calf shot, and the herd should be done at about the same time to keep all animals in synch for their yearly boosters. Remember our calf weighing service is available at the same visit to monitor their progress against growth targets.

A suggested protocol, that would ensure young stock are regularly checked, could be:

December – 5 in 1 primer (or 10 in 1 in some cases) for calves, +/- B12 and Se

January – Lepto primer for calves

February – 5 in 1 booster for calves

March – Lepto booster for calves

Lepto for yearlings

Lepto for herd

Please discuss a suitable vaccination and drenching programme for your farm with a vet.

## Lameness Seminars

Clutha Vets has secured the services of Taranaki vet Neil Chesterton, one of New Zealand's leading dairy cattle lameness experts, to present two workshops for our clients.

### Management of Lameness

A small group, full-day mix of illustrated talks, videos, and practical sessions.

Topics include cow behaviour and lameness; cattle handling to prevent lameness; shed design, track construction and cow flow; identification and treatment of major conditions; knife sharpening.

13<sup>th</sup> February 9.30am – 2.30pm; Based in Balclutha, cost \$200 per person (includes lunch). Bring overalls and gumboots.

### Understanding and Preventing Lameness

An evening seminar aimed at all dairy workers. Expect a fascinating explanation of lameness, with lots of illustrations from farms like yours. You will go home with new ideas on how lameness can be prevented.

Rosebank Lodge, Clyde St, Balclutha.

13<sup>th</sup> February, 7.30pm, \$20 per farm (bring as many staff as you like!)

To book your place, phone Sue or Shona (03) 418 1280

## Prescriptions

In the recent round of shed checks, we understand the inspectors have been very keen to see your copies of the prescriptions we provide for you each year. This demonstrates their importance in the eyes of your milk company and the NZ Food Safety Authority, as well as ours.

This is one of the reasons why we make the effort to fulfil our obligations (and yours) for annual Health and Production consultation, and Milk Quality Review. We would like you to get as much out of the process as possible.

If you have a shed check coming up, and don't have up to date information on hand (either the laminated shed sheet or the full prescription for your animal health folder), please contact us for a new copy.

Helen Clark and driver were cruising along a country road (at the legal speed limit) one evening when an ancient cow loomed in front of the car. The driver tried to avoid it but couldn't – the aged bovine was struck and killed. Helen told her driver to go up to the farm house to explain to the owner what had happened. She stayed in the car to continue her phonecalls.

About an hour later the driver staggered back to the car, smiling happily. He was holding a half empty whisky bottle in one hand, and a huge, rare cigar in the other. His clothes were in disarray, and he was smeared with lipstick.

“What happened to you?” asked the Prime Minister

“Well,” the driver replied, “the farmer gave me the cigar, his wife gave me the wine, and their beautiful twin daughters made passionate love with me”

“My, God, what did you tell them?” she asked.

The driver replied “I just stepped inside the door and explained that “I'm Helen Clark's driver and I've just killed the old cow”. The rest happened so fast I couldn't stop it!”

## Retail News

Darrell and Bart Wendelgelst (Clinton) will be heading off to Stewart Island on the Ancare “Take a mate fishing” weekend. Congratulations, and we hope your luck is as good as John Den Baars' was on the recent Dectomax White Island fishing trip. Not a bad Kingy he's holding!

