Dairy Farmer Newsletter May 2008

CLUTHA V·E·T·S Animal Health Centre

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Balclutha Vets

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John Smart	B.V.Sc.
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Rob Mills	B.V.Sc.
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Alisa McDonald	B.V.Sc
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Practice News

First and foremost, congratulations to Alisa. The former Miss Harrison is now Mrs McDonald. Unfortunately, since returning to work after her wedding she has had another horse-shoe experience, this time courtesy of a snotty stallion who collected the side of her face with his front foot, while she was attending to its wound. It might be office work for her for a little while, fortunately we still have some Milk Quality Reviews she can tidy up!

For some time we have been looking to employ another experienced dairy cattle veterinarian, to increase the level and range of services we can offer to our clients. In the last few days we have secured such a person, and we look forward to them starting before next spring. More details will follow next month.

Dairy Industry Awards

Clutha Vets were pleased once again this year to be sponsors of the New Zealand Dairy Industry Awards Otago Competition (formerly Sharemilker of the Year and Farm Manager of the Year). This year, instead of contributing to the general prize pool, we initiated an "Animal Husbandry Merit Award". We felt that those who looked after their cows best, deserved specific credit.

The prize was won by **James and Helen Hartshorne**, who sharemilk for Lachie and Jan Campbell at Paretai. Well done, guys! We were really thrilled that when they accepted the award, they acknowledged that good farming is based on looking after the girls who make the money.

Our congratulations also go to the overall winners, of the Sharemilker competition Greg and Kelly Kirkwood, from North Otago; second place getters Murray and Tammy Illing of Clinton; and the Hartshornes who also gained the Recording & Productivity award and third place overall.

Other Clutha Vets clients who received awards were:

Paul and Rochelle Urquhart (Outram)
:ATV Safety award

Paul and Joanne Barton (Inchclutha)
: Dairy Hygiene and Farm Environment awards

Paul and Jill Crawford (Telford)
: Leadership award

In the Farm Manager of the Year competition, **Chris Boyden (Wangaloa)** won the Human Resource Management and Farm Management awards; and **Daniel Gordon (Milburn)** won the Westpac Financial Planning and Management award and the overall title of Otago FMOTY.

Congratulations to all of those who rose to the challenge, and put their farms and practices under the microscopes for critical evaluation. Everyone who enters learns a great deal about themselves and their performance. We look forward to supporting the competition and the competitors again next year. Give it ago!

Mastitis Matters – Drying Off

There is more to drying off cows than sticking a tube of dry cow up each quarter and turning them out. The cow's udder must undergo some fairly significant changes when it goes from producing milk to not producing milk, and the process should be carefully managed. We try to cover some of the issues at the Milk Quality Review, but it's worth repeating them here:

Prior to drying off

- Dry off high risk groups early before rest of herd : High SCC cows (>400,000); Low yielders (<10L/day);Cows with low condition score (<4).
- Clearly mark their udders after treatment, and get them well away from the shed and the milking herd. We often see IS grades at this time of year!
- Decide date of final milking for main herd.
- If cows are producing >10 litres per day then reduce feed intake to maintenance levels for 4-5 days. Do this by using smaller breaks, and feeding with hay/straw. Do not restrict water intake. If the cows are producing less than this then feed restrictions not required. You may need to dump the last milking.
- If production is <5 litres per day, there may be issues that effect DCT distribution in the udder, and this can lead to IS grades in Spring.
- Once-a-day and skip-a-day milking is not recommended, as SCC will increase and clinical mastitis may develop.
- Use DCT immediately after the last milking.

After drying off

- Return cows to a clean paddock. Don't use effluent paddocks, and try not to let dung build up – bugs on the udder will cause mastitis.
- Continue feeding at maintenance levels for seven days after drying off, to stop milk production. Only start to increase feed once most cows have stopped bagging up.
- Visually check for sick cows (mastitis) in the paddock each day.
- If at all possible, keep the cows on farm but away from the cow shed for first 10 days, to

minimise udder leakage.

- After 10 days, run them through the shed, and feel each udder for heat, pain and swelling. Do not strip any milk unless the cow has clinical mastitis. This would remove the keratin teat plug that the cow has been working hard to form.
- New cases of clinical mastitis should be treated with a course of lactating antibiotic.

Winter jobs – Calf sheds

As the onset of winter and the welcome relief of drying off fast approaches, it is time to think about all those jobs that need to be done in preparing for the coming spring. With the current value of heifer replacements, repairs and maintenance (and even a little new construction) on the calf rearing facilities should be high on the list of priorities. Farmers need to be looking to ensure that their calf rearing setup is in a condition to ensure maximum calf health and growth. Calves will achieve good growth rates providing that they are **DRY** and their environment is **DRAUGHT FREE** and **CLEAN,** and they have **ADEQUATE SPACE**. Here are a few pointers that may be of some use to those thinking of constructing a new shed or upgrading the old, as well as for those who are preparing their old shed for the coming season.

Shed design is important to ensure that the correct environment is created. Ideally calf rearing sheds should have the following features:

- Three sided shed with the opening facing North to ensure maximum sunlight, as well as shelter from the Southerly wind
- Twice as deep as they are wide or high (cuts down the draught in the shed).
- Have a free draining base material (shingle), on top of which is laid a deep bed of absorbent material such as wood shavings or saw dust (at least 20cm deep)
- Layout of pens is important – a central race from which each pen can be accessed, is ideal.
- Solid partitions between pens prevents the transfer of any unwanted bugs to adjacent pens
- Don't forget about having a separate area (ideally separate shed) for the sick calves
- Some people also like to keep bobby calves in a completely separate area from the heifers to minimise the risk from the bobby truck.
- Each pen should be supplied with unlimited fresh water, in a trough above pooing height.
- Hay/straw as well as meal should be provided from day one to promote rumen development (meal is cheaper than the equivalent amount of milk).
- Hay/straw needs to be hung in nets or racks up off the floor. Meal troughs should be up off the floor as well.
- Each calf requires 1.5m^2 (new born Jerseys) to 3m^2 (Friesians ready to go out). Ideally there should be no more than 20 similar-aged calves per pen and no more than 100 calves per shed.

There are a number of things that need to be done to prepare the old shed for the new season which include:

- Cleaning out all the old bedding (ideally done in Summer at the end of rearing)
- Either spray high-powered disinfectant or water blast all surfaces; bedding, partitions, equipment used and walls up to 1-2 metres. This kills or removes unwanted bacteria or viruses, such as rotavirus, which build up in the environment during the calf rearing season.
- Lay down new bedding (sawdust, wood shavings) which needs to be 20 cm deep.
- Check the shed for any draughts *down at the calf level*

If your calf rearing shed is a converted shearing shed, then there are a number of things that can be done to improve the environment. Shearing sheds are designed with slatted pens to ensure maximum airflow, just what a calf rearing shed doesn't need! Calf growth rates in such sheds will be stunted as calves have to use extra energy to keep warm. To prevent draughts, gaps under the shed need to be boarded up, shade cloth can then be laid down on top of the slats and the sawdust or the chosen bedding put on top of this.

Calf rearing is a challenging part of any dairy operation. It is therefore important that the rearing facilities and systems are well thought out to ensure that things run smoothly and the calves reared are healthy well grown animals. If you have any questions about your calf rearing facilities or procedures please don't hesitate to contact us here at Clutha Vets. "Success in anything is simple. It's doing what's right, the right way, at the right time."

Abortions

Between now and the start of calving we usually field a number of calls regarding abortions from cows scanned in calf. While most farmers are prepared to accept occasional losses without identifying a cause, there are certain things that make it worth ringing us to investigate further. These include:

- More than 2-3 abortions in a mob in a week
- More than 3% abortions over the winter
- All abortions in a particular age group, mob or paddock
- Cows becoming sick after aborting
- Abortion of "abnormal" calves (eg rotten, deformed or with peculiar skin markings)
- More than 5% of cows scanned in calf failing to calve

Abortion can be a "multifactorial" with infectious agents (viruses, bacteria and fungi) interacting with environmental (stress) and nutritional (deficiencies, toxins) factors.

The main reason to identify the cause of the abortion is to prevent any further cases, either this season or next. For some of the major infectious causes of abortion, vaccines are available, and it may not be too late to use them in the face of an outbreak. Environmental and nutritional causes may also be identified and can be eliminated. Another reason is that a number of the diseases that cause cattle abortion are also transmissible to people, and so it may be important to identify these cases to alert and protect yourself and your staff.

The most helpful thing to get a diagnosis is the aborted calf and its membranes, and the fresher the better. This will enable us to take samples for laboratory testing. The longer the calf is lying in the mud, the higher the chance it will become contaminated with soil organisms. Sometimes there is information to be gained from a vet visit to the cows themselves (eg blood samples, uterine fluid samples), the feed (eg nitrate in crop, "off" balage) or the site (toxic plants).

1. Stress. In many cases we are not able to identify a single infectious cause of an abortion outbreak. While there are some inadequacies with sampling and testing techniques, the main reason is probably that most abortions are a result of "stress", usually a combination of nutritional deficiencies (eg a gross energy deficit, which may also be seen as loss of BCS; or trace elements – selenium, vitamin A, copper, zinc) and bad weather / lack of shelter.

2. Poor quality conserved feed. Although cow guts are remarkably robust, and an cope with some pretty poor quality food, it can contribute to nutritional stress if it is being used as a major source of energy. Also, if the pH of the balage/silage does not fall low enough, quickly enough, during manufacture, or if stacks and bales are left open too long, fungi and bacteria will grow. Some of these can cause abortion. Fungi (mould) should be visible (and smellable!), and we can test pH here at the clinic to see whether the main cause of bacterial abortion (listeria) is likely to be present.

3. Nitrate. Winter crops can accumulate nitrates when conditions are "right". These include periods of active growth after rain following dry conditions; after dull, overcast conditions favourable to growth but not photosynthesis; soil sulphur and molybdenum deficiency. Neonates and foetuses are more susceptible to nitrate poisoning than adults, so you may see abortions without noticing sick cows.

4. Macrocarpa, other cypresses and pines. Eating the needles of these, usually from dead branches that have been pruned or brought down by wind, is well known to cause abortion, and most years we would see at least one of these outbreaks. Just don't risk it!

5. Leptospirosis. Can cause abortions. Yet another reason to make sure your herd and young stock are fully vaccinated!

6. BVD. Can cause a wide range of reproductive problems, ranging from early embryonic loss (you won't see anything, just have a higher number of lates and empties at pregnancy testing) through to abortions and the birth of deformed calves. We've been banging on about this one a fair bit in recent years, if you are interested in pursuing the BVD status of your herd, please call and speak to a vet.

7. Neospora. This is a parasite whose life cycle moves between cattle and dogs. Discourage

visitors (eg duck shooters) from bringing dogs onto the farm, and watch what you feed your own dogs. We don't know a great deal about the disease, but it is probably more common, and a more common cause of abortion, than we have previously believed. Fortunately, there is a good lab test for the disease, so if it is the cause of a problem we should be able to pinpoint it.

8. Salmonella. The new flavour ("Brandenburg"), is more likely to be a problem than the ones that have been around a while. It is more common in sheep, but has caused cattle abortions during winter at this end of the country. Aborted foetuses are usually rotten and the cows become very sick. There is a high risk of people contracting this disease if they handle the cattle / foetuses. Outbreaks are related to stress, overcrowding on feeding breaks, poor weather etc. Antibiotics (not penicillin) may save the cow's life, and a vaccine is available that may help during an outbreak.

Wire wounds on winter crop

You've probably heard our message often enough about gradual introduction of brassica crop to the diet for rumen health (see the February newsletter item on feeding summer turnips, it's on our website at www.cluthavets.co.nz), but there's another health issue to remember.

Around this time last year there was a spate of vet call outs to cows with leg injuries caused by wire. Break feeding over winter increases the risk of this type of injury happening and some of the results are not pretty. We have seen cows and heifers with swelling, lameness and infection due to wire getting wrapped around the leg just above the fetlock, or caught up between the toes. Worse than this, if the animal struggles excessively and/or is left unnoticed for a period of time, severe injury to the blood supply, nerve supply and tendons can occur, in the worst cases necessitating euthanasia.

Though not all wire injuries are avoidable, the following precautions may reduce the risk of one happening and the potential waste of a valuable animal:
1) Make sure the power supply to the break fence is reliable and double check for shorts.
2) Use tape rather than live strand. Live strand tends to be more injurious if a cow does get caught, as it is very abrasive and cuts into the tissue much like embryotomy ("piano") wire. It is also harder to see than tape fencing.
3) Don't leave the cows waiting too long for that next break, as there is always an inquisitive cow willing to test out the power supply, or one that learns to push over standards. Two small breaks a day (not 1 large) should be standard procedure.
4) Check for and remove any loose wire or fencing material lying in the mud as this is another common cause of wire injuries.

If, despite best intentions, an animal does get tangled in the wire, speedy removal of the wire will hopefully prevent permanent damage to the blood or nerve supply. If the animal is caught up and distressed, a vet may be required to administer sedation in order to untangle the animal safely. Veterinary assessment will also provide the appropriate treatment for injuries of the nerve or tendon, which may require splinting, bandaging anti-inflammatory and antibiotic treatment.

Ignorance (and brutality) can be costly

On 15th April, a Marlborough farmer was fined $6500 for illegally dehorning cattle. He used loppers, and no anaesthetic, to remove horns from 54 cattle aged 20 months. The situation came to MAF's attention when an Animal Welfare Investigator noticed dried blood on the head and shoulders of the cows. He then made things much worse for himself by being obstructive to MAF and the police.

The court heard that the cows would have experienced intense pain, suffering and distress. It went on to say "the Painful Husbandry Procedures Code of Animal Welfare is clear – de-horning without pain relief must be performed when animals are as young as possible, and before they reach nine months of age. Dehorning is painful, but until such time as pain relief can be made compulsory for all animals, the Code states that it *must be used for animals over nine months*".

Brief reminders

Milk Quality Reviews – If you are planning to use dry cow therapy this season, remember your legal obligation to complete a Milk Quality Review with a vet first. This can be a really useful opportunity to discuss all sorts of mastitis related issues.

Rotavec – This injection, given to cows pre-calving, in combination with good colostrum management can have a huge impact on calf scours. Willy and June are taking orders for the coming spring now (it needs to be given a minimum of **three weeks** before PSC)

Winter plant check and rubberware replacement – book it in with your service agent now, so it can be done before calving rolls around.

Cull cow liver samples – Going into winter, the best measure of copper stores comes from liver samples. If you are sending to cattle to slaughter at any plant we can organise for these samples to be taken, and we will contact you with results and recommendations. Ring either clinic to request this *before* the cows leave the farm.

Transport to slaughter – Remember cows must be able to *bear weight on all four legs* before they can be transported. Lame cows should only go to the *nearest* works. They should be transported on the bottom deck of the truck, in a pen on their own, and the transport company will need to know this in advance. If you have any doubts, pass the buck to us and get a Vet. Cert.

Lepto – Herd, R2's and calves should all be done by now.

Drenching and delousing – There are production advantages to worm drenching milking cows at this time of year. It may also help with maintaining BCS going into and throughout winter. A –mectin family drench will also control lice on those animals that are treated. A straight de-louser (no worm control) is cheaper option, but watch for milk and meat withholding periods.

Centenary Celebrations –

Golf Day – Thursday 19th June, at Balclutha.

Followed on Friday 20th June by an **Open Day** at the Balclutha clinic.

Open to all members, with the following events:
12-4pm: Refreshments and BBQ
5.30-6.30: Happy hour at Rosebank Lodge
6.30-10pm: Speakers, entertainment and supper
Numbers are required for catering, so please contact the clinic to register for either of these events.

All I Need to Know About Life I Learned from a Cow

1. Wake up in a happy mooo-d.
2. Don't cry over spilled milk.
3. When chewing your cud, remember: If there's no fat, no calories, no cholesterol, there's no taste!
4. The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.
5. Turn the udder cheek and mooo-ve on.
6. Seize every opportunity and milk it for all its worth!
7. It's better to be seen and not herd.
8. Honour thy fodder and thy mother and all your udder relatives.
9. Never take any bull from anybody.
10. Black and white is always an appropriate fashion statement.
11. Don't forget to cow-nt your blessings every day.

Retail News

- Genesis Pour-on herd pack (12.5ltr). Treats 500 cows @500kg, for $3.01 each (net, incl GST).
- Genesis Pour-on 5.5ltr. 200 cows for $3.43 each
- Cydectin Pour-on 15ltr. Choose either an extra 2ltr free, or receive a gas bbq and lpg table heater
- Dectomax Pour-on herd pack (6x2.5ltr). Treats 300 cows. Comes in a fishing tub with an applicator gun and a cap.
- Tempor Pour-on lice treatment. Buy 5ltr and receive an extra ltr free.
- Oral drenches for calves. Oxfen C Hi Min, Plain and Plus; Arrest C. Sharp prices – see in store.
- Tux 40kg. All purchases go in the draw for a Yamaha Duo- Grizzly 700cc farm bike and a Raptor 80cc (Nationwide competition).
- Meaty Bites. Working Dog 20kg $43.99; Naturals 18kg $41.99.
- Whiskas cat food 24x400g cans $32.99