

# Dairy Farmer Newsletter October 2009



**CLUTHA · V · E · T · S ·**  
**Animal Health Centre**



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## Practice news

The vet team has come through the calving season unscathed, which is always good as we approach the busiest couple of months of the year. While August and calving can throw up some fairly hectic days, there are often a few quieter ones as well (especially in the good weather of this spring). However September to November are invariably busy all day, everyday for vets and techs, with mastitis investigations, calf

deubudding, at risk cows, and then non-cycling cow treatments.

We have had quite a number of vet students through the practice in recent weeks, which gives us a good opportunity to assess them as we look for new recruits, and also gives them a vital chance to learn. We appreciate your patience with these young people. The impression they get of you (and our relationship with you), has a major influence on where they choose to work.

## CIDR use – the practicalities

This year, the recommended treatment protocol for non-cycling cows is the use of a CIDR, with a series of three injections (at CIDR insertion, removal, and 48 hours later).

Cows will routinely be “metrchecked” to ensure they are not carrying uterine infections, and a number may be “palpated” (have their ovaries felt) to ensure that they are genuinely anoestrous. This will help you (and us) decide how aggressively to treat the animals presented.

The CIDR is in for seven days, during which time no cows should come on heat. Over the next 48 hours up to 10% of cows should come on, they should be served and removed from the programme (Rule of thumb: Any cow that is on heat should be served, regardless of how she got there. “If you don’t shoot, you won’t score!”). Those that don’t get served receive the third injection 48 hours after CIDR removal, and all of these are inseminated 16-20 hours after that, regardless of whether or not they are displaying heat.

It may be worth re-inserting the (carefully cleaned and dried) CIDRs removed from treated cows back into the same cows 14 days after they have been served, for another six days. The aim is to encourage these cows to cycle again if they have not held to the service, rather than slip back into anoestrous as “phantoms”. Although it’s unclear exactly how effective this is, no additional injections are required for this, so it’s straight “extra bang for your bucks”.

## CIDR use – the economics

A compact calving spread should be a key aim for all dairy farmers who are trying to achieve increased production - through a high 6 week in calf rate and maximising days in milk. It is well accepted that early-calving cows are more likely to get in calf earlier in that season’s mating period, and with the uncertainty around the future use of inductions, farmers should be aiming to get cows cycling and in calf as early as possible.

The use of modern CIDR programs in studies involving 2000+ cows has been shown to increase submission rate to 100% for treated cows, and increase first service conception rate

by around 12% compared to those cows which go untreated. All things being equal, it is reasonable to expect that treated cows are less likely to require the use of CIDRs in the following season.

The economics of treating cows with CIDR programmes hinges on the payout. The recent predicted increase to 5.10/kgMS improves the return on investment significantly. A partial budget using this payout (with an average production figure of 1.2 kgMS/cow/day) including the cost of the CIDR and increased feed costs due to extra days in milk, demonstrates a **net gain of \$54 per cow treated**.

In order to gain the most out of your CIDR programme cows need to be identified and treated seven days prior to the planned start of mating. This allows the maximum days in milk to be gained by getting these cows in calf ASAP.

Cows should be tail painted five weeks before the planned start of mating and then checked twice a week. Any cows which have cycled can then be painted a different colour. Seven days out from the start of mating those cows which have not cycled (and have been calved for at least 6 weeks) can be treated, so they can be served right at the start of mating.

If you wish to treat only some of the non-cyclers, which ones should you choose? This is a Catch 22 situation.

The “deeply anoestrous” cows that are most likely to need treatment (eg light, young, poorly-fed or recently-calved cows) are the ones least likely to respond, and so CIDRing them may seem like a poor investment. However, if you do nothing, they are even less likely to get in calf early. The cows that are on the verge of cycling will probably respond well to a CIDR, but then they may have come on, on their own, within a short time anyway. The economic modelling shows that in both of these situations, CIDRs do pay off, but you need to be clear what your expectations of the treatments are.

In the end, CIDRs will *not* influence your overall empty rate. If you leave the bull out till March, eventually those cows will cycle and get in calf. But, regardless of how you choose to use the CIDRs, they can significantly improve your 6 week in calf rate, and this will make you money.

## Programmes for cycling cows

Cows that have had a heat can be “short-cycled” so that they come on again sooner than waiting the full 21 days. We can use this to bring forward the cows that cycle in the week or so before PSM to the start of the second week of mating, rather than waiting for their natural return in third week. Using aggressive treatment of non-cyclers and this sort of “Why Wait” programme, some farmers achieve close to 100% submission in the first fortnight of mating.

There are a range of programmes available, and the more vigilant you are willing to be with heat detection before PSM (and the more tail paint colours you are prepared to use!) the more you can get out of them. Speak to a vet about designing a programme that will meet your requirements, if it sounds like the sort of thing you are interested in.

## Heifer synchrony

If yearlings are mated a few days before the start of mating for the main herd this year they will obviously start calving earlier than the herd next year. This will give them more time after calving to start cycling before 2010 PSM. A few carry-overs mated at the same time may be helpful to train them to the shed.

Three main options remain for synchronising heifers for AI. The more tightly you wish to synchronise them (reducing the number of days for heat detection) the more effort is required before hand.

**a) Single PG.** Spot mate the yearlings to detected heat for 6 days. On the seventh day, all unmated animals are injected with PG, and the majority of these will come on over the ensuing 4-5 days. Net result – most heifers getting served over about 10 days of AI to detected heats, with about 75% of them requiring a single injection.

**b) Double PG.** Thirteen days before PSM all animals are given a PG, and this is repeated two days before PSM. Most animals should come on two, three and four days after the second injection. Net result – most heifers getting served over about three days of AI to detected heats, but all of them requiring two injections.

**c) CIDR-synch.** Essentially as for CIDRing non-cycling cows. Two vet visits, starting nine days before PSM, with all heifers blanket inseminated on the first day. Net result – three yardings, all animals submitted and no heat detection required.

In a recent trial across a number of Waikato farms, the CIDR-synch programme was shown to produce a higher first service conception rate (more AI calves) and a higher 21 day pregnancy rate (more calves born earlier, therefore more days in milk and more time to get back in calf next season) than the double PG programme. This gave a greater net economic return on investment for the CIDR programme, as well as making the job a lot simpler.

## Inductions

“The Induction Code” under which we have been operating for the last five years will be reviewed next year (before next Spring). The relevant authorities are still seeking submissions from any interested individual or group. While there can be no official word yet, there is some “word from the street”.

The Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Group (who licence drugs for use) have stated that they no longer perceive any great risk to trade from inductions.

MAF Animal Welfare have stated that currently they perceive the welfare surrounding the use of inductions to be acceptable because of the Induction Code.

It is likely, therefore, that inductions will be allowed next Spring, although under new guidelines there may be further tightening of the conditions. Critical aspects of new guidelines would be:

- Commitment to a continued reduction and the eventual phasing out of inductions.
- A robust method of policing farmers who continue to induce high percentages (>5%?) of their herd (DairyNZ likely to have a central role in this).
- Further tightening on foetal age at induction.
- A strong element of support to help farmers succeed without inductions.

The best way to prepare your farm for this is to concentrate on getting your 6 week ICR as high as possible, to reduce the need to induce.

## Heat detection

Good heat detection programmes can have a major impact on overall herd reproductive performance. The key to ensuring semen is not wasted and cows conceive at the right time is accurate heat detection. **The cost of a missed heat to you can be conservatively estimated around \$150.**

The first step to getting better results is to see if your current heat detection practices need to be improved. There are two types of errors that occur during heat detection. You can miss a cow actually on heat; or you can misinterpret the signs shown by a cow and think she is on heat when she's not.

If you miss a lot of heats, the submission rate of your herd will be low. The submission rate is a key driver of the 6 week in calf rate. You are aiming for high submission rates, but you don't want to achieve this by inseminating cows that are not on heat.

It is recommended to do paddock checks as well as using some other heat mount detector e.g. tail paint, kamars etc. It has been shown to achieve more accurate heat detection.

Heat behaviour is most obvious at the cows' **quietest** time and thus it is best to observe then. The heat behaviour often starts at night and the cows are busiest in their sexually active groups then. Heat behaviour is less obvious at the busy times during the day e.g. milking time and when the cows are feeding.

It is more suitable for only 1-2 dedicated workers to do the paddock and shed checks for heat detection. Optimum time for paddock checks in order of preference is late in the evening, briefly before collecting cows for milking in the morning, mid morning and before evening milking. You should do it as unobtrusively as possible for about 10 minutes and use binoculars if you want. Record the cows' number in your notebook. It is always handy to have an easy-to-read, accurate tag number on the cow!

Ovulation (the release of the egg so that it can be fertilised) occurs 25 – 30 hours after the cow comes on heat. Therefore, cows observed on heat at morning milking would ideally be inseminated that afternoon, and those on heat in the afternoon would be served the following morning.

## Bulls

Pretty soon bulls are going to be joined to heifers and then some time around Christmas do the follow up "job" on the main herd. Every year, around pregnancy testing time, a story comes out that the guys have not done the expected job. Sometimes with hindsight a reason is found, but sometimes too much time has elapsed and the situation changed to the point where it is hard to know exactly what the problem was that caused the poor in-calf result.

Bulls should be fit, fertile, willing and able to do the job. A few steps taken now can increase our chances markedly of making sure it happens.

**1. Fit** – Strong, healthy, well grown and walking easily and freely. Any doubt here and common sense suggests that the bull should be removed immediately and replaced. **LOOK FOR LAMENESS ESPECIALLY AND ACT!**

**2. Fertile** – The most common cause of infertility here is a fever any time from 60 days before mating and during the mating period. Sometimes scrotal abnormalities can be a cause. Also BVD and Lepto, where a non-vaccinated bull is introduced and picks up the disease from the heifers/cows and has a fever reaction. He may also be a BVD carrier (antigen positive) animal and transmit the disease to the females. So insist on vaccination and blood test carrier negative before buying.

**3.** Some bulls are just not **willing**. They just bugger off to the far end of the paddock and take no part in proceedings through fear of other bulls or lack of interest. You need spare capacity in order to replace these. Also some bulls may not be willing because of overwork – again insure spare capacity.

**4. Able** – When bulls are first introduced, check that the mating is successful. Just because the bull is thrusting does not mean he is mating successfully. A successful mating is characterised by jumping, thrusting, intromission and then a harder thrust (sometimes with the back feet leaving the ground) and, particularly afterwards, a loss of erection and a relaxed appearance. Prolonged thrusting without this can often be an indicator of penile injury. Also small yearling bulls on Holstein type cows clearly will not be successful.

Some extra points.

1. At least one bull per 30 cows in the herd at any one time. In larger operations running two herds, circulate the bulls between herds and rest one group of three with the lame/sick/penicillin mob.
2. If you are using yearling bulls, drop the ratio to 1:20. Yes, older bulls are better
3. Always build in spare capacity. Bulls have a high attrition rate, expect it.
4. Plan for extra bull power if using synchrony programmes. Discuss this with us. It may mean restarting AB for a short period to give the bulls a hand.

### Mastitis matters

With the majority of cows now in milk, and hopefully over the tricky calving period, we can start to assess and deal with mastitis on another level. Up till now the majority of infections will have been associated with environmental conditions with *Strep. uberis* to the fore. In many herds *Staph. aureus* will start to become more of an issue, particularly if the milking machine is not functioning efficiently, or there are “people” issues such as inadequate teat spraying, over-milking or taking the cups off inappropriately. In the milkers, a reasonable target for new clinical mastitis cases would be 1% of herd size per month. So, anything more than 1 to 2 cases per week for a 500 cow herd should be considered significant. We have a lot of experience in this area and can offer plenty of practical advice, so please contact us to arrange a shed visit if you are concerned about the level of clinical mastitis, the size of the Bulk Milk Somatic Cell Count (BMSCC), or any other issues such as teat end damage.

Now is also the time to review your mastitis treatments, and get some samples in for testing. Some of the products you will have been using through the Spring may not be so effective against contagious bacteria such as *Staph. aureus*.

If everything is going smoothly, and the mastitis rate, BMSCC and incidence of teat end damage are low, then you can look to reduce the concentration of your teat spray (e.g. 1 part teat spray to 9 parts water for iodine based products, rather than 1:3 which you should have been using up till now).

With many farms herd testing around now, there is sometimes a need to raise the vacuum slightly for this procedure. We recommend avoid doing this unless absolutely necessary, and only make slight adjustments (1 to 2 kPa), taking careful note of the starting level. Above all, remember to turn it back after herd testing. Beware of faulty or sticking vacuum gauges, and if in doubt, get the vacuum checked after you have made the adjustments. Differences of 0.5 to 1 kPa can make a huge difference in some sheds.

If you have any queries about the way your shed is functioning may be impacting on mastitis, we can help!

### Bits and Pieces

BVD bulk milk testing season is upon us. This is the starting point for assessing the potential impact of this disease on your herd. It should be repeated annually, once most of the herd are in milk. If you are not sure whether you have booked in this season's test please phone the clinic.

On the subject of bulk milk tests, remember we can also organise a B-Sure test on bulk milk, to assess the economic impact of using a worm drench on your milk cows.

Milk samples (for mastitis culture) coming to the Clydevale store on Friday afternoons, often don't make the weekend cut-off. If you have samples on Fridays that need urgent attention, they can be dropped straight to the Balclutha clinic, or if they are less urgent, they can be frozen until Monday.

Calf debudding is in full swing. If we are coming to your calves, remember they should not have been fed milk within three hours. We prefer to work on calves between 2 and 6 weeks old, the charge for older calves (more drugs and time required) is slightly more.

The “Mad Cow Disease” (BSE) surveillance scheme is still operating. If you have a cow that meets certain criteria (some downers, nervous disease etc.) and we can collect her brain, you can receive payment from MAF for it. This is a way of retrieving some money from a cow that would otherwise be worth nothing.

## Mating Checklist

- ❑ This season's inductions should now be well and truly out of the way.
- ❑ Feed lactating cows maximally
- ❑ Consider supplementary feeds until after mating (PK, molasses etc)
- ❑ Separate young/light cows into their own mob; consider milking them once a day.
- ❑ Consider Rumensin bullets for light cows **(now)**
- ❑ Consider Eprinex for young cows, from around calving time **(now)**
- ❑ Blood test /liver biopsy cows for trace element status, six weeks before PSM **(26/9/09)**
- ❑ Start iodine supplementation (if not already doing so) four weeks before PSM **(10/10/09)**
- ❑ Use cow covers on light cows
- ❑ Mate maiden heifers early **(2/11/09)**
- ❑ Consider a programme to condense mating of yearlings & carry-overs (e.g. PG synchrony).
- ❑ Identify and mark "at risk" cows **(now)**
- ❑ Check and treat at risk cows (even if checking whole herd), one month before PSM **(7/10/09)**
- ❑ Tail paint "late calvers", from 42 days before PSM **(26/9/09)**
- ❑ Tail paint herd at least 28 days before PSM **(10/10/09)**
- ❑ Record heats and change colour of cows that cycle
- ❑ Consider a PG programme to condense cycling cows. Tail paint appropriately.
- ❑ Consider early treatment of non-cycling cows **(e.g. CIDR's in 30/10/09; out 6/11; third shot 8/11/05 and mate 9/11/05)**
- ❑ Retain CIDR's for re-insertion, discuss dates with vet
- ❑ Buy an adequate number of suitable bulls early **(now)**
- ❑ Isolate bulls until confirmed free from BVD & EBL and consider leptospirosis status.
- ❑ Blood test and vaccinate bulls for BVD and EBL **(as soon as purchased)**
- ❑ Rotate bulls between mobs of cows; allow for spells

At the South Otago A&P show, one of the first exhibits a dairy farmer and his wife stopped at was the breeding bulls. They went up to the first pen and there was a sign attached that said, "This bull mated 50 times last year." The wife playfully nudged her husband in the ribs and said, "He mated 50 times last year,"

They walked to the second pen which had a sign attached that said, "This bull mated 120 times last year". The wife gave her husband a healthy jab and said, "That's more than twice a week! You could learn a lot from him!"

They walked to the third pen and it had a sign attached that said, in capital letters, "THIS BULL MATED 365 TIMES LAST YEAR."

The wife, so excited that her elbow nearly broke her husband's ribs, said, "That's one a day. You could REALLY learn something from this one."

The husband looked at her and said. "Go over and ask him if it was with the same cow."

## Retail News Direct phone line 4181281

### Members prices, including GST

- **Milligan's Calf Milk Powder** - \$71.65 / 20kg, free delivery on orders over a tonne.
- **Sergent Dan's Clutha Calf Meal 25kg** - \$25.73. Free delivery on orders over a tonne.
- **Take a Mate Fishing** – All purchases of Merial Ancare Cattle drench qualify for the draw beginning now. Take you and your mate to Stewart Island for a great 2 days of fishing.
- **Genesis Pour on 5lt** – Buy 2x5lt and get 1x5lt free.
- **Eclipse Pour-on** – This top-line combination pour-on is now available in a 5.5lt for the price of a 5lt.
- **Dectomax Injection & Pour-on** – Purchase 2 starter packs and receive a slaughter pack consisting of Victory boning and skinning knives, a Cambrian 30cm steel and scabbard.
- **Cydetin Pour-on** – Receive 10% extra free on the 2 & 5lt packs and get a 17lt pack for the 15lt price.
- **Kaiwaka Clothing** – All lines of this wet weather clothing have 30%off (shop stock only).
- **Deer velvet capsules** – Activel 60's \$28.64; Sportsvel 100's \$40.42