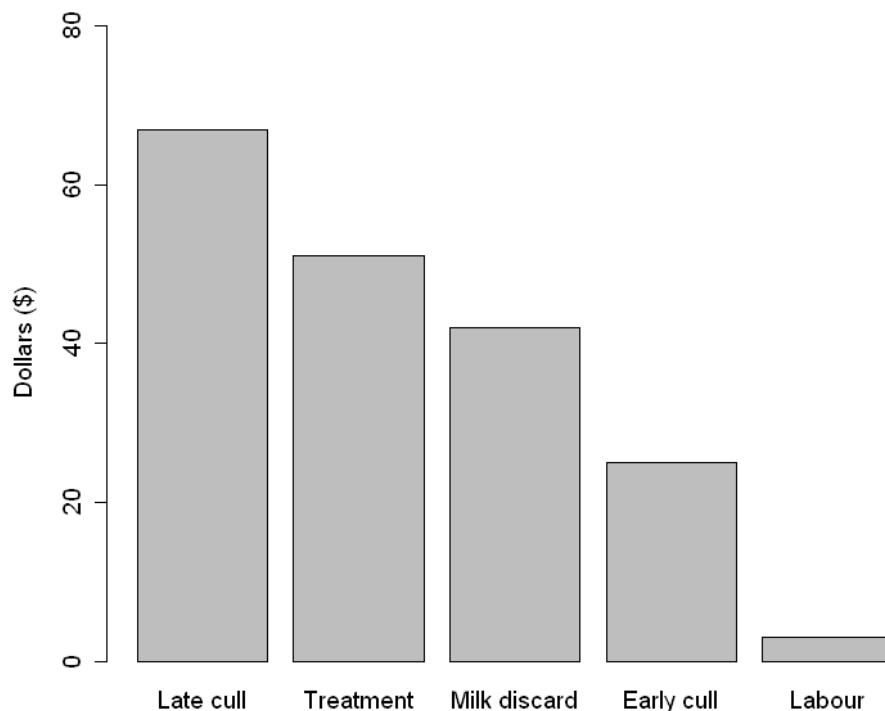


New research shows high costs of heifer mastitis

A nationwide study currently underway has shown that costs due to this common problem average a total of \$197 for every first case in the season, and \$2020 for the average 340 cow dairy herd in New Zealand. In the last 10-20 years both in New Zealand and internationally, there has been increased awareness that mastitis in dairy heifers was common, but there was little information on why that was so, or what the costs of this disease were. The pattern of disease (almost all clinical cases occur within 7 days of calving) and the bacteria isolated from milk of cases (almost always bacteria from the environment, such as *Streptococcus uberis*) are different to adult cows, meaning a fresh look at mastitis in this age group was needed. Research over the last 5 years by veterinarians at Animal Health Centre Morrinsville and scientists at DairyNZ, funded by DairyNZ and Sustainable Farming Fund (Ministry of Agriculture), has helped understand this common and frustrating problem, given some practical methods farmers can use to control it, and for the first time now, an accurate estimate of its economic costs and benefits of prevention.

In the current 2008-2009 season, a survey involving 40 herds divided among 4 dairying regions of New Zealand- Waikato, Taranaki, Canterbury and Otago, has sought to better define the costs of this disease and to provide farmers with cost-benefit budgets for different control options. Data was collected on the number of cases on each farm, costs due to extra time involved in managing and treating these heifers and purchasing additional replacements because of culls and deaths following cases, and losses due to discarded milk and lost production in the current and following season. These are separately shown in the graph below assuming a \$5.50 per kg MS payout, \$750 difference between cull and replacement heifer, and \$17.50 per hour labour cost.



As can be seen from the bar graph, the easily calculated cost of treatment (\$ 51) is only about one quarter of the total cost because of 'hidden' losses and costs. Surprisingly, each case of heifer mastitis required on average a total of only approximately 1 minute per milking or 12 minutes per case to manage for the duration the animal was having milk withheld from supply, meaning the labour costs per case are low (\$3). However, most farmers will know that frustration and worry over mastitis can't easily be defined by a dollar value. Nevertheless, a cost of about \$200 per case is also a good reason to find out what can be done to prevent cases in the future.

Following on from this research, a series of meetings will be held around the country in March 2009 to provide information about heifer mastitis and mastitis in general to farmers. Additional meetings for rural professionals will be held in conjunction with these. Veterinarian-researchers from Animal Health Centre Morrinsville, Scott McDougall and Chris Compton will present information from their latest research and practical approaches to controlling the problem. In addition, this group has attracted two international experts in the field of mastitis- Rod Dyson from Australia and Theo Lam from Holland. These are dynamic and interesting speakers, who will bring their own perspectives to solving mastitis problems from many years of experience of working with individual farmers and their industries. This is a unique opportunity to interact with New Zealand and international mastitis workers, and plenty of time will be available to discuss issues over lunch at the start of the sessions and through the presentations.

The farmer meetings will be held from 12:00 to 2:30 p.m. on the following dates and locations:

- Monday 9th March: Morrinsville (Lyceum Club, Moorhouse St)
- Tuesday, 10th March: Whangarei (Barge Showground's Events Centre, Barge Park, Maunu
- Tuesday, 10th March: Ashburton (Ashburton Hotel, 11 Racecourse Rd)- unfortunately no overseas speaker at this venue
- Wednesday 11th March: Stratford (TET Multi Sports Stadium, 65 Portia St)
- Wednesday 11th March: Balclutha (Rosebank Lodge, 265 Clyde St)

Please register your intention to attend by e-mailing awilson@ahc.co.nz or phoning on 07 8898236.