

# Dairy Farmer Newsletter April 2013



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



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## **Around the Practice**

Another hot, dry month goes by, with the Highlanders yet to record a win and England securing a memorable draw in the final cricket test!

More locally, the rugby competition is under way and it's good to see several of our clients finding time to put on the boots on a Saturday afternoon. Valley is off to a strong start again with a convincing win over Clinton. What's with handing over the goal-kicking to a prop forward, Hamish?

On the staff front Elsbeth is working hard putting the finishing touches to "Annie" the local SO Theatrical society musical for this year. She has the role of choreographer and you know the saying about working (or not!) with children and animals... Keara has been home to the UK for a visit and is returning mid April, looking forward to a bumper ski season! In the office, with the departure of Susan Kornyei to Dunedin, we have a new accounts person – Debbie Mills, who some of you may have come across at the ANZ.

Many of you are struggling for feed right now, and are having to adopt strategies including drying cows off early, getting rid of empty cows and reducing milking frequency. You will be looking at your drying off procedures and will be starting to think about the annual Milk Quality Review. We have enclosed an MQR/Mastitis questionnaire to help us cover all the pertinent points around your drying off procedures and DCT requirements. Please fill it in and return to us as soon as possible. You will see in the accompanying letter that there is a prize draw for all returned questionnaires offering our technician service to assist with drying off for up to 200 cows.

In early May Clutha Vets in conjunction with Jim Gibbs a vet with Lincoln University, will be hosting a session on 'Winter Crop Management' with an emphasis on fodder beet feeding. Jim is an expert in Dairy Cow Nutrition, and the day will be aimed at dairy farmers and graziers. Details to be confirmed.

## Drying Off

### Dry Cow Therapy

We are nearing that time of year again; the time of year when farmer and dairy cow alike can forget about making milk and start thinking about vacation. For your cows it will mean not having to come into the shed on a daily basis. For you it will also mean not having to go into a shed on a daily basis and may mean some quality time away. Why not take the worry out of the dry period this year and enjoy your time off by considering a dry cow option specifically tailored to your operation?

This season we will once again be strongly pushing the use of combination dry cow therapy with an antibiotic and an internal teat sealant. When done properly these two dry cow options can be extremely beneficial to curing existing infections and preventing new ones in the spring, meaning less mastitis and more milk in the bulk tank. We feel that the benefits from using an internal teat sealant are significant enough that most farms would benefit from choosing a dry cow programme that used a sealant in combination with an antibiotic, as opposed to just using whole herd therapy with a big gun intra-mammary antibiotic.

With the world wide shift moving away from overuse of antibiotics in food producing animals, many of you may find that selective dry cow therapy is the best option for you. This is a programme aimed at finding the cows in your herd that require a treatment of antibiotics versus those in your herd that do not. We would then recommend using combination therapy on the infected cows and internal teat sealant alone in the un-infected cows. Although this may require more work there are a lot of savings in the form of less

dry cow purchased with a great result in the spring. Many of you may find that this option interests you for various reasons and we at Clutha Vets will be more than happy to discuss this option with you and provide a dry cow service to assist you with the labour involved.

Any dry cow therapy must be administered with care and attention to detail. This is particularly important when using teatseal alone, since you do not have the safety net of an antibiotic. We strongly recommend that you make use of our dry cow service, but a "best practice" video, online training and a prize draw are all available at [www.teatseal.co.nz](http://www.teatseal.co.nz)

### Heifer Mastitis – What heifer mastitis?

Once again this year we will be running our highly popular and successful heifer teat sealing service. The feedback for this remains positive and the number of clients signing up and continuing with this service annually tells us that they are seeing results. You would have received a form last month regarding this service and we ask that you return them ASAP so that we can start confirming dates. If you would like further information or like to discuss teatsealing options for your heifers, please call us at the clinic.

### Bacto Lab

Our milk lab is again able to offer pre-dry off milk sample cultures to get a good bacteriological picture of your herd's situation and help you make better decisions about mastitis management and treatment. We can even offer a technician service to come to your shed and collect the samples (we recommend about 30) when it best suits you. The results are available very quickly (usually within 48 hours) and can then be used by both you and your veterinarian. We also offer a culture of a sample taken from your bulk tank(s). While not nearly as accurate as the random samples it does provide somewhat of an idea of the situation in your herd and is a considerably cheaper alternative. Knowing the main bacteria causing problems in your herd can definitely help in selecting an appropriate dry cow product and strategy.

### Milk Quality Reviews

We have a wide range of products available for your herd's dry cow therapy, spanning from well priced, highly efficacious, long-acting products to the less expensive shorter-acting options, so that we can meet your requirements, whatever the budget. There is also a special price on Teatseal when used in combination with any antibiotic product, so we are not narrowing down your treatment options. We are more than happy to discuss and answer questions about products and their use at anytime.

Our vets will gladly discuss any dry cow options you may be interested in and work with you to

determine the best strategy for your herd. With our friendly and knowledgeable staff, a wide range of scientifically proven products, and great prices we look forward to serving you and improving your productivity through animal health.

### Ryegrass Staggers

We have seen a few cases of “staggery cattle” in the past couple of weeks, with Ryegrass Staggers being the most likely diagnosis. This is caused by a toxin which is produced by the endophytic fungus that grows in perennial ryegrass, with the toxin levels highest at the base of the plant. Ryegrass staggers is one of the most common causes of nervous signs in cattle (and other stock, including sheep, deer and horses) and is seen throughout New Zealand. In South Otago we see it in late summer – early autumn, and really only in drier years. It affects all classes of cattle, however less so in milking dairy cows as they tend to change paddocks regularly and do not graze the pastures as low. Cattle show signs within 7 – 14 days of being put on affected pastures with signs usually only evident after they are disturbed. Cattle will

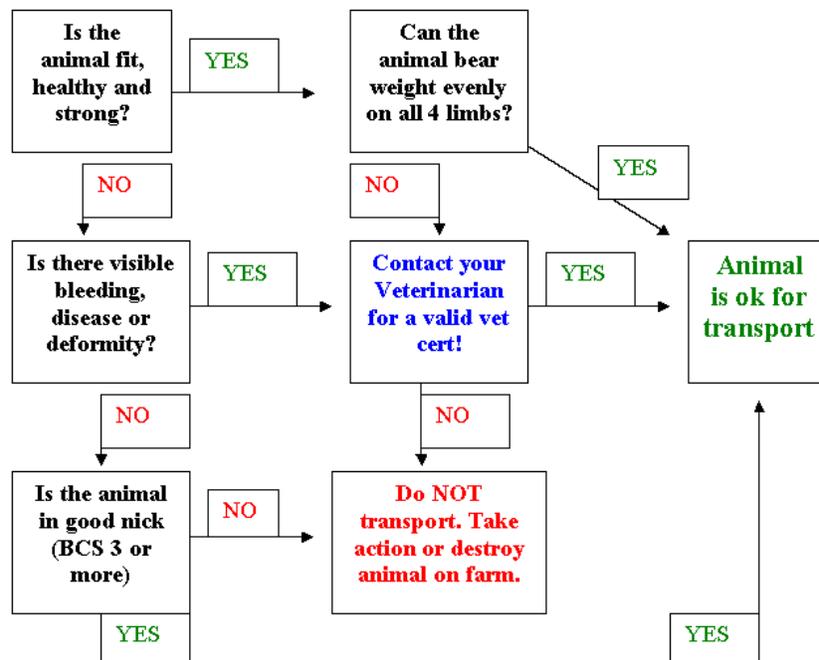
walk with jerky movements and may stagger and collapse. In most cases they will recover if they are left undisturbed. Signs can be exacerbated by heat stress. Generally deaths only occur from misadventure – drowning etc. Severe cases of the disease can be quite serious though as stock can be impossible to shift, which affects growth rates in young stock and makes milking affected cows very difficult. The following control options may be available:

- Shift stock to newer pastures – many of these will not have the endophyte that produces the “staggery toxin”.
- Avoid hard grazing of older ryegrass pastures.
- Renew pastures with endophyte-free ryegrass or “safe” ryegrass with endophyte that doesn’t produce the toxin.
- Remove affected animals from the herd and dry them off or milk them once a day.

Feed supplements such as silage, palm kernel, summer turnips and grain (in shed) to reduce the amount of affected pasture they have to eat.

### Veterinary Certificates - Fitness of Livestock to Transport

One of the hardest things for us to do as vets can be to fill out these certificates. They might sound easy; *show up, sign the paper, and leave*; however, they are not! We are often put into a situation where we are torn between wanting to satisfy the client and doing what we believe is best for the animal. There are also some clear (and some not so clear!) guidelines as to what is acceptable or not acceptable for certification. If we certify an animal that is obviously unfit, it puts us in an extremely bad light with our colleagues at the meat works, and may even lead to more serious issues with the Vet Council of NZ. This being said, calling a veterinarian to certify an animal in question is the best idea for making sure you make the right decision for you and the animal. The flow chart in figure 1 can be used as a guide in making the decisions regarding transport.



Common reasons for animals requiring vet certs are: lameness, “cancer eye” and sunburn (photosensitivity). As a part of the certification process, the vet may give a list of requirements associated with the transport of the animal. Requirements may include same day slaughter, transportation to the nearest works and individual animal transport. These requirements have to be met in order for the vet certificate to be valid, and will often mean that the stock agent, transport company and freezing works will have to be notified prior to the transport. Calling and requesting a vet cert half an hour before the truck arrives does not allow time for all this to happen. We thank you for your understanding and cooperation and while we try to accommodate our clients, ultimately the decision comes down to our knowledge of what is acceptable.

### Managing Abortions on Your Farm

We all put a lot of effort into reproductive management of our dairy animals. It is disheartening to see all this work go to waste when cows abort after being scanned as pregnant. Knowing about bovine reproduction and how to minimise the risk of abortion, as well as how to deal with it, are important parts of your reproductive programme. The normal pregnancy is 282 days (~40 weeks or 9.5 months), but there can be variation on this time period by +/- 15 days. Hot weather and stress can cause cows to calve earlier than expected. An actual abortion is classified as a calving, with expulsion of a stillborn fetus more than 2 weeks early. The causes of abortion are too numerous to list, however the most important causes include IBR virus, BVD virus, Leptospirosis, Brucellosis, Neospora, Fungal placentitis as well as various toxicities, including Macrocarpa and pine needles.

If you notice an abortion and you want it investigated, we request that you submit the whole fetus, part of the placenta as well as paired blood samples of the aborting cow taken 2-3 weeks apart. We realise this is often difficult, but try to get as many as possible and contact your vet right away to start working up your abortion case.

Some research suggests that it may be normal for cows to lose up to 15% of calves from the time of pregnancy diagnosis, however any abortion rate around 1% (around 5 animals at once) should definitely be looked into with your veterinarian.

Knowing the potential for these losses, it does pay to have your whole herd scanned pre-dry off to find any animals that may have slipped between scanning and now. This will save you drying off and treating an empty cow only to have her puzzle you and your vet as to why she hasn't calved in the coming spring.

Some tips to help prevent abortions on your farm:

- Develop and follow a proper vaccination protocol with your vet.
- Do not stress or overcrowd cows.
- Ensure good nutrition and that your cows are in good condition.
- Practice good biosecurity, particularly around new animals brought onto the farm.

### This Month's Retail News

The list of specials this month is as follows:

- **Merial Ancare Cattle Injection/Pour-on** – Receive a fishing rod on selected products and go into the draw for a fishing package, exclusive to Clutha Vets, plus the “Ultimate Fishing Package” (national promotion).
- **Boss Cattle Injection/Pour-on** – Receive men's cologne on 2.5 ltr packs and a vest on 5ltr packs.
- **Tux 40kg** - \$94.12 nett incl. GST while stocks last.
- **Combat Topline 5 ltr Pour-on** – only \$468.21 nett incl. GST – that's \$2.34 nett incl. GST per 500 kg cow.
- **Dectomax Injection** – Receive an electric knife sharpener or a high quality sheath knife with every 2 x starter packs.



**Cownundrum** – Unfortunately there were no correct entries to last month's quiz. The correct answer would have been Lucy the Cow, who was taken by Bad Jelly the Witch, from the book written by Spike Milligan.

Clutha Vets Dairy Team