



By Anna Burrell & Sam Howarth



The calves are coming thick and fast now - by the time you receive this, most of your heifer replacements will have been born.

As the numbers build up, you need to identify who is who, which is when good ear-tagging practice becomes vital.



Ear Tagging

While we were out disbudding calves last year, it came to our attention that quite a few calves had ear infections from tagging. These can be avoided by following best practice at ear tagging time.

7 Easy Steps to Ear Tagging Calves

1. Restrain calves adequately to ensure accurate tag position. Having another person to help makes the job much easier. While calves are sedated for disbudding is a perfect opportunity.



2. Identification System

Ensure you select the correct tag colour and mark the tag appropriately. Double check you have the same number front and back (don't laugh!). Record NAIT numbers and EIDs accurately.



3. Location

Placing the tag correctly in the centre of the ear is key to it staying in place and not causing problems. If it is placed too close to the base of the ear it may disrupt blood flow and cause areas of the ear to die off. Alternatively if tags are placed too close to the tip of the ear they may be easily ripped out. Also, place it in the middle top to bottom, between the two ridges of cartilage that run from the ear hole out to the ear tip.

4. Use of applicator

Ensure your ear tag applicator is in good working order and that tag pieces align correctly. Having to pierce the ear twice, or re-tag the calf, doubles the chances of a problem. Occurring.



5. Clean the ear

Remove any dirt from the ear - don't put a tag through poos, saliva, stale milk, bedding etc stuck to the ear. Place the tag.

6. Disinfect the applicator between calves using an appropriate disinfectant E.g. Vetacide /meths/ iodine.



7. Infection

After tagging, monitor calves closely for signs of infection—pain, swelling or discharge. The tag should be removed immediately if this occurs. Some calves may require antibiotics and a surgery to remove diseased cartilage. Please contact us at Clutha Vets if you are concerned.

Calf Care "Toolkit"



Dairy NZ have launched a new "Calf Care Toolkit" - a very user friendly electronic survey on their website. It assesses various management practices that you may employ on your farm. Depending on your answers, it suggests improvements you can make. Check out <https://www.dairynz.co.nz/animal/calves/calf-care-toolkit/> to see how you are doing.