

CUD

“Cows Under Discussion” or “Something to Chew On”



March 2021

Clinic news

Much of the practice area is now starting to look quite dry, although most farms are managing to feed cows pretty well, and production is good. With the arrival of March, autumn rains can't be far away, with any luck they'll give the crops a well needed drink, and maybe allow one last cut of baleage.

The focus now is firmly on the close of the season—early dry-off of light, lame or cows doing poorly for other reasons, preparing for drying off (more than just Dry Cow Therapy) and choosing springer and calving paddocks. To help ensure a stress-free winter, why not come along to one of our seminars at the end of March? We will be holding them in Outram, Balclutha and Clydevale, and covering off a range of autumn health topics.

End-of-season tail scoring

As we all know, a regulation restricting any shortening or removal of tails came into effect from October 2018, making it a vet-only procedure on animal welfare grounds. The animal welfare conversation regarding cows' tails has gone far beyond that however, and tails are now under the spotlight more than ever.

Tails can be damaged by getting stuck on rails in the shed but unfortunately they are sometimes damaged maliciously by people. However tail damage is probably most commonly caused by people poorly understanding how to move cows safely and using poor technique, bending and damaging tails.

This obviously has a negative impact on the cow's welfare, both causing pain and damaging the function of the tail. For you as the farmer, there are significant potential legal consequences and dealing with an issue with damaged tails on farm can be a very stressful situation.

If you have any concerns about damaged tails in your herd, or would like to help prevent any future damage give us a call and speak to one of our vets about tail-scoring the herd or training your staff in appropriate animal handling. Tail scoring can be done at milking and provides a record that can be referenced if any issue arises in the future.

Body Condition Scoring and Strategic Dry Off

Knowing your cows' BCS now allows for ensuring individual cows are dried off at the right time to meet targets in the spring. This will maximise milk production and contribute to a quick return to cycling.

- Mixed aged cows should be a BCS of 5 at calving
- 2 & 3 year olds should be a BCS of 5.5 at calving
- Cows won't put on weight for about 2 weeks at drying off and during the last month of pregnancy
- In general, you can reliably put on 0.5 BCS units per month during the dry period.

Knowing the BCS of cows going into winter allows for cows to be grouped according to their condition score, allowing for better feed efficiency – a cow at BCS of 5 will not benefit from being any fatter, however she will eat the extra feed that you want to give a cow at a BCS of 4.

The tables below give an indication of when to dry off cows based on their current BCS to achieve desired BCS by their calving date. For example, a cow at a BCS of 3.5 now, due to calve 20th August, should be dried off no later than the 12th of April. However, an R3 with the same BCS and calving date should be dried off by the 13th March.

Dry off dates vs condition score Cows putting 0.5 BCS gain in 30 days									
Calving Date									
BCS	10-Aug	20-Aug	30-Aug	9-Sep	19-Sep	29-Sep	9-Oct	19-Oct	29-Oct
3	3-Mar	13-Mar	23-Mar	2-Apr	12-Apr	22-Apr	2-May	12-May	22-May
3.5	2-Apr	12-Apr	22-Apr	2-May	12-May	22-May	1-Jun	11-Jun	21-Jun
4	2-May	12-May	22-May	1-Jun	11-Jun	21-Jun	1-Jul	11-Jul	21-Jul
4.5	1-Jun	11-Jun	21-Jun	1-Jul	11-Jul	21-Jul	31-Jul	10-Aug	20-Aug
5	1-Jul	11-Jul	21-Jul	31-Jul	10-Aug	20-Aug	30-Aug	9-Sep	19-Sep
5.5	1-Jul	11-Jul	21-Jul	31-Jul	10-Aug	20-Aug	30-Aug	9-Sep	19-Sep

Dry off dates vs condition score R3's putting 0.5 BCS gain in 30 days									
Calving Date									
BCS	10-Aug	20-Aug	30-Aug	9-Sep	19-Sep	29-Sep	9-Oct	19-Oct	29-Oct
3	1-Feb	11-Feb	21-Feb	3-Mar	13-Mar	23-Mar	2-Apr	12-Apr	22-Apr
3.5	3-Mar	13-Mar	23-Mar	2-Apr	12-Apr	22-Apr	2-May	12-May	22-May
4	2-Apr	12-Apr	22-Apr	2-May	12-May	22-May	1-Jun	11-Jun	21-Jun
4.5	2-May	12-May	22-May	1-Jun	11-Jun	21-Jun	1-Jul	11-Jul	21-Jul
5	1-Jun	11-Jun	21-Jun	1-Jul	11-Jul	21-Jul	31-Jul	10-Aug	20-Aug
5.5	1-Jul	11-Jul	21-Jul	31-Jul	10-Aug	20-Aug	30-Aug	9-Sep	19-Sep

End-of-season BVD testing—a case study

A local farm tested BVD negative in the bulk milk at the end of last season, but positive on the first test this season. We can then assume that the positive cow was not in milk last year at the time of testing, or is a new introduction to the herd. All recently brought in animals and heifers were blood tested. One heifer was identified as infected and removed from the herd. The subsequent bulk milk test was negative. This heifer was born in 2018 from a 2016 born dam. We suspect that this dam picked up a transient infection while grazing off farm in the 2017 mating period, and passed it on to her unborn daughter.

The combination of having data available from previous seasons and acting promptly when the positive result was reported ensured the PI was identified quickly, and removed well before the start of mating. This reduced the risk of more BVD infections arising during this season's mating, and in next Spring's calves.

If you haven't had a BMT this year, it is not too late. Call the clinic and we can arrange for it to be done.

Risk of injury

It is important to remember every time something is inserted into an animal (natural or not), there is a risk of damage to the cow. From sticks up noses that cows put there themselves to vaginal haematomas caused by assertive bulls, injuries do happen. When pregnancy testing - be it with a scanner or an arm - there is a risk, however small, of perforating the rectum. The use of lubricant, and patience with straining cows, are some of the things we do to minimise the risk, but the prompt identification and treatment of cows is critical. If you notice a sick cow soon after pregnancy testing by us, or by or a scanning outfit, please do not delay in calling us out for a look. The sooner she is seen the better her chances will be.

Things to do in March:

- Late season Body Condition Score the herd for strategic dry off
- Book for our autumn seminars—Outram, Clydevale and Balclutha
- Start getting data ready for your Milk Quality Review (including Dry Cow Therapy discussion)
- Complete leptovaccination for calves, heifers and herd
- Complete pregnancy testing—cows & heifers
- End of season trace element testing, tail scoring and BVD bulk milk test