

# CUD

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



November 2017

## Clinic News

Does anyone remember a final-week-of-October as hot and dry as this year's was? Normally the week before PSM is bleak and wet, the cows are shutting down and we are all pulling our hair out. This year, however, grass is consistently growing at 100kg day on some farms, silage is being cut, cows are milking well, and cycling well. Hopefully the last day or two are an aberration.

This month, as Marc McElrea and Brad Storer leave for their AI runs, we are joined by Lauren Johnston as a new technician at Balclutha. You may recognise Lauren from the time she spent with us when she did her tech training at Telford a couple of years ago.

On the “family” front Bridget welcomed Elliot back in September, and Steve welcomed his second daughter to the world last week. Elspeth and Tracy MacColl are both now on parental leave excitedly awaiting their new arrivals.

Finally, next week sees the AGM of your Vet Club. On Tuesday night (14<sup>th</sup>) at the Balclutha Clinic, you will get the chance to hear from MPI about Mycoplasma bovis, and find out a little more about where that “additional members discount” you received on last month's statement came from.

## Repro “failure”

Why is it that some farmers seem to regard reproductive interventions (eg treating non cycling cows with CIDR's) as a “failure” of themselves, their cows or their management systems? Our cows give us so much every day, it's hardly surprising that some of them may need a hand to maintain a 365 day calving cycle. We don't consider it a failure of our pastures that we have to apply fertiliser, a failure of our staff that they use a four-wheeler to get the cows in, or a failure of our effluent management that we use settling ponds and weeping walls before discharging the waste. Why not give the cows a hand to do what we ask them to?

If you have cows that have been calved more than 35 days, and haven't yet had their first heat, it's not too late for us to examine them, and recommend a cost effective treatment. While a CIDR probably gives the greatest certainty of getting the cow in calf quickly, other options are also available. Our manual assessment of the whole reproductive tract (with or without scanning the ovaries) may be a good option for these girls.

## Subclinical mastitis

As herd test results are starting to come in, some farmers are keen to treat high cell count cows with antibiotics, in an attempt to bring down the bulk milk cell count. In some ways this make sense – after all the only difference between clinical and subclinical mastitis is how hard you have to look to find it - and if these cows were clinical, they would definitely be treated. To make it worthwhile however, you need to carefully think about the cause of the high SCC, the likely effectiveness of the treatment and the cost.

Our new Mastatest in house milk tester can quickly and cheaply determine the bugs causing the mastitis, and the best choice for treating it. There's no point throwing a couple of any-old-tubes up the teat, when quality information is available to help make an informed decision, that will greatly increase the chance of achieving the result you are looking for.

## Photosensitivity

Many people are prepared for a few cases of photosensitivity (“Spring eczema”) when they start feeding the summer turnips, but we have started to see it popping up already. Lush green grass is high in chlorophyll

(the stuff that turns sunlight, water and CO2 into sugar) and when the diet contains a large amount of this, the cow (or calf's) liver may not be able to process and excrete it all. The chlorophyll accumulates under the skin, and can continue to react with sunlight, causing a severe reaction. The cow may respond by being agitated (grass staggers), kicking at itself (twisted gut), going down (dislocated hip); in fact one vet who worked here used to say "photosensitivity can look like any other cattle disease"!

There is no single specific effective treatment, but we know the condition is intensely painful. Providing shade will help, although a cover may be irritant. Filtbac cream is both a sun block, and antibacterial, if the skin becomes infected. Sometimes antihistamines are given, and anti-inflammatories may help but must be used with caution. Oral zinc dosing has been suggested. If you are getting cases of Spring eczema, please give us a call to discuss your options.

### **Bull fertility testing**

Nationwide, one in five bulls used on dairy farms are sub fertile. An infertile bull will serve cows but not get them pregnant, effectively blocking them from the other bulls. Thus their impact is not neutral (and able to be overcome by increasing bull numbers), but it is actively negative.

Fertility testing bulls is probably easier and quicker than you think. We perform a physical exam then collect semen using modern electro-ejaculation, which nowadays is the worldwide recognised standard. Bulls are graded using a number of different criteria. Scrotal circumference should be greater than 34 cm for 2 year olds and greater than 36cm for mature bulls. Sperm motility is scored from 1 to 5 and the percentage swimming appropriately in a straight line is noted. Morphology testing looks for abnormalities in individual sperm, that decrease fertility.

Most bulls get a good pass. Some causes of infertility can be treated but it takes at least 60 days for fertile sperm to be produced after the problem has been corrected. Due to the tight New Zealand calving season most infertile bulls end up being culled and need to be replaced. Early testing is key.

### **Clutha Vets AGM**

The Board of Clutha Veterinary Association cordially invites all members to the Annual General Meeting of the Association to be held on **Tuesday 14 November, 2017, at 8.00pm** at the Clutha Veterinary Assn premises 2 Wilson Road, Balclutha.

At the conclusion of the AGM business, guest speaker MPI veterinarian William Sheehan, will present an update on **Mycoplasma bovis**, with an opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have. The evening will conclude with supper.

Copies of the Annual Report are available on our website – [www.cluthavets.co.nz](http://www.cluthavets.co.nz), or by request from our Wilson Rd office – phone 03 418 1280 or email [smcnuitt@cluthavets.co.nz](mailto:smcnuitt@cluthavets.co.nz)

### **Things to do in November:**

- Monitor AI submission rates. 90% submission in 3 weeks requires 4.5% of the herd to be put up every day
- Treat non-cycling cows
- Call us for bull fertility testing
- Check herd BVD bulk milk results
- Book LeptoVac+ consult on farm, with your staff
- Plan a health programme for the calves over the summer - feeding, weighing, drenching, trace elements