

Dairy Farmer Newsletter January 2010



CLUTHA · V · E · T · S ·
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Practice News

Happy New Year! All of us here at Clutha Vets hope that you have had a fun and relaxing festive season, and are looking forward to the challenges 2010 may bring.

Late December saw just about enough rain to get some bottom back into the rank milking pastures, and to get the winter crop booming. Things look pretty good feedwise around the district for the next little while; so it would be ok for it to stay

fine, warm and dry for the rest of the school holidays!

Here at the clinic, we are excited about the arrival of two new Massey-trained vets. Steven Butler and Alice Lee will both be based in Balclutha, and while their initial "bleeding in" will involve working with all species, they are both keen to move into the production animal side. Please make them feel welcome when they come up your tanker track for the first time!

Mastitis matters

We are starting to get a few people coming in with the question: "I've got a cow with mastitis in one quarter. I've already treated it with X and Y, but it's not getting any better. What should I use now?"

The first thing to realise is that if a full course of a couple of different mastitis treatments have already failed, the chances of success with another are not great. By the time we are looking at, say, the third choice antibiotic, the infection is long-standing, there may be permanent changes in the udder, there is a higher chance that we are dealing with antibiotic-resistant bacteria or a new infection that has been introduced by multiple insertions of intramammary tubes etc etc.

Another issue is, that by this time of year, we are more likely to be looking at a "contagious" type of mastitis (eg *Staph aureus*). These are caused by bugs that live on the skin of the teats, and are spread from cow to cow during milking. These can be notoriously difficult to treat.

These recurrent/refractory cases should be discussed with your vet. Taking all relevant factors into account, we can decide whether further treatment is justified, or whether the cow should be dried off or even culled. If drying off is the best option, we will usually prescribe a long-acting dry cow therapy, combined with Teatseal. Individual quarters can be dried off, but **not** while clinically affected, and **not** with antibiotic dry cow therapy. Rubber rings on teats are inhumane and illegal.

We can also use an iodine infusion to dry off a quarter permanently. This is only to be done on suitable cases, following a strict protocol, and only after discussion with a vet.

An even better option is to avoid these cases altogether, which is usually quite straight forward if the SAMM plan is followed.

- 1) Maintain good teat condition (speak to us before adjusting concentration of disinfectant or emollient)
- 2) Teatspray every cow after every milking
- 3) Check that the teatspraying is being done properly:
 - Check that spray is made up fresh every couple of days
 - Check the concentration of the spray
 - Check that all four teats are getting covered with an appropriate volume of spray
- 4) Milk mastitis cows last – that's right, draft them off, and put them back out on the yard until the end of milking.
- 5) Get the machine checked
- 6) Book us in for a milking management visit, to identify human and machine factors that may be contributing to mastitis in the herd

It's time to be thinking about how many milkings the liners have done. A liner is at its best the day it comes out of its box, and from then on, it only goes down hill. It is therefore best to start the new season with new liners. It is a myth that it is best to do the first month of milking on soft old liners (to be kind to the soft teats) before replacing them.

A visual inspection of the rubberware is helpful, but in itself will not reveal the micro-cracks that can be harbouring bacteria or leaking air, or subtle changes in the shape and elasticity that alter the effectiveness of the squeeze. It is better to work off a calculation of liner life.

The table below gives the life of liners in days (twice a day milking) for given herd and shed sizes. The 10th of January is 153 days from 10th of August, so unless you are milking a small herd through a big shed, they are probably due for replacement.

Number of clusters in shed	Herd size													
	200	250	300	350	400	450	500	550	600	650	700	750	800	850
24	150	120	100	86										
28	175	140	117	100	88									
32	200	160	133	114	100	89								
36	225	180	150	129	113	100	90							
40	250	200	167	143	125	111	100	91	83	77	71	67	63	59
44		220	183	157	138	122	110	100	92	85	79	73	69	65
48			200	171	150	133	120	109	100	92	86	80	75	71
52			217	186	163	144	130	118	108	100	93	87	81	76
56			233	200	175	156	140	127	117	108	100	93	88	82
60			250	214	188	167	150	136	125	115	107	100	94	88

Life of Liners in days (twice a day milking)

Heifer rearing

If you were to take a snapshot of first and second calvers in many herds at the moment, you would find that many of these will have not been mated to AI and the hope is that the bull will get them in calf.

A closer look at the first calvers in particular reveals that they are often still smaller in stature than mature cows or in poor condition (BCS <4).

These animals are expected to produce milk, grow out and get back in calf after having just calved for the first time. Unfortunately, the "get in calf" part happens late, if at all. Raising good young stock that get in calf easily, particularly after their first calving, is a process starting back when they were born.

By now most, if not all, of your calves have been weaned. Growth and health of these animals from here on until they join the milking herd is critical. Young stock need to be treated as well as, if not better than, the milkers in terms of the amount of feed available and the quality of that feed.

All importantly we need to get these animals up to the right weight and stature before winter so that they can cope with this more easily.

For this reason, target weights for August-born calves by the middle of May are:

- 160kg (Jersey)
- 180kg (Kiwicross)
- 200kg (NZ-type Friesian)
- 220kg (Bigger, American-type Friesian)

Working back from there, minimum weights for all individuals (not the group average) for late January are:

- 100 kg (Jersey)
- 115 kg (Kiwicross)
- 130 kg (NZ-type Friesian)
- 140 kg (Bigger, American-type Friesian)

When did you last weigh your calves to check them against these minimums? What can you do to bring them up to target, or keep their growth on target?

- 1) Offer leafy green pasture with a high clover content (ME > 11.5 and protein >16%). This might be available on a paddock that is regrowing after a silage cut.
- 2) Luxury feed to no less than 1600-1700 kgDM cover residual. Use *other* classes of stock to tidy

up residuals. A good strategy when calves are still on the home farm is to graze them *ahead* of the milkers. Always shift calves frequently (every 1-2 days). Shifting only every 5-10 days just does not do it for calves.

3) If feeding meal/pellets, continue to do this for 1-2 months after weaning at least. Crushed barley can replace some or all of the meal cost-effectively, and still balance the diet reasonably with quality pasture.

4) Mob size, if too large (greater than 80-100), can lead to heavy competition and a large condition score spread. Keep mob sizes +/- 80 in large herds and group according to size and type of stock.

5) Calves need to be wormed (drenched) proactively, preferably with a combination drench (discuss this with us). Use a selenised drench. Drench from the time they have been on grass for two weeks until mid May. Of all the animal health problems affecting growth, worms are still the most common and most important, with trace elements and things like BVD coming a distance behind in importance.

6) Copper bullets and long-acting selenium products can be administered as a preventative from early January. Get trace element levels checked beforehand if mineralised worm drenches have been used, Se prills have been put on with fertiliser, selenised 5-in-1 or B12 has been given etc.

7) Ensure your Lepto/5 in 1 vaccinations plan is followed. Consider BVD vaccination if appropriate.

Wintering:

Now is the time to sort out your winter grazing. All too often we hear from farmers who are disappointed with the way stock (particularly young stock) come back from wintering. When the owners haven't made the effort to see the calves "since they went away", we are a little less sympathetic. A good agreement with a grazer will specify what they are to be fed, detail trace element and parasite treatment responsibilities, and, most importantly, include weight gain expectations and a monitoring programme.

In wintering, if at all possible, winter on grass and quality supplement. This provides a better balance than winter crop for young stock. If you have no alternative to winter crops, then make sure that the crop is only half the diet. The rest must be made up of quality silage/baleage.

Inductions, length of mating and pregnancy testing.

The outcome of the review of the Induction Code of Practice (jointly being undertaken by the Veterinary Association, Federated Farmers, Dairy Companies Association of NZ and Dairy NZ) is to be decided in February 2010.

Assuming they will be allowed next Spring, how can you now reduce the number of inductions on your farm? About the only thing that can be done at this stage is to take the bull out earlier, and cull (or carry over) the cows that are unable to get in calf within, at the most, 14 weeks of the start of mating. Those cows have fertility issues! You could make some hard decisions about the fertility of the cows in your herd, before those decisions are forced on you. Many people who stopped inducing several years ago are now at a stage where their empty rates are no higher than they were when they did induce.

Length of mating:

It is time to be pulling the bulls out from the yearlings. The "InCalf" programme suggests mating heifers for no more than nine weeks. If you started them a week before the herd, then they will all be calved by the end of week 8 of calving, giving them four weeks to turn around before the next mating. Late-calving heifers are over-represented in the groups of non-cycling cows we treat.

Leaving the bull with the herd for an excessively long period (beyond mid February) actually achieves very little. Figures show that extending mating from 12 to 15 weeks probably only gets another 1% of cows in calf overall. And any cow not mated til week 15 can't be induced to calve much before week 5 of calving – which is just late enough for an induction. Is it really worth having the bulls hanging around for an extra month for the sake of a handful of late potential inductions?

If you target 8% empty at the end of mating, and those cows are all cycling, you can expect to see two on heat every day in a 500 cow herd. This level of bull activity is nothing to get excited about, and no reason to prolong mating by another fortnight!

Pregnancy testing:

So, you are going to take a punt that inductions will be allowed next spring, and you are going to limit mating to something reasonable, say 14 weeks. With the standard eight weeks of calving,

this leaves six weeks worth of calvings as potential inductions. Usually this would be done as two, three-week groups; the first group induced to calve right at PSM, the second group induced to calve in the third or fourth week.

To identify these groups, we would ideally pregnancy test between 6 and 10 weeks after the cut-off you wish to identify. So, if all you need to know is the cows due any time in the first 8 weeks, add 6 – 10 weeks to that date (14 – 18 weeks after PSM), and that is the time to test. The table below shows the latest time to pregnancy test for the various cut-offs you may be interested in, for different PSM dates.

PSM	First 2 weeks	First 6 weeks	First 8 weeks
25 Oct	17 Jan	14 Feb	28 Feb
29 Oct	21 Jan	18 Feb	4 Mar
1 Nov	24 Jan	21 Feb	7 Mar
3 Nov	26 Jan	23 Feb	9 Mar
5 Nov	28 Jan	25 Feb	11 Mar
7 Nov	30 Jan	27 Feb	13 Mar
9 Nov	1 Feb	1 Mar	15 Mar
11 Nov	3 Feb	3 Mar	17 Mar
13 Nov	5 Feb	5 Mar	19 Mar
15 Nov	7 Feb	7 Mar	21 Mar
17 Nov	9 Feb	9 Mar	23 Mar

Of course, pregnancy testing can be used much more strategically than just identifying inductions. On some farms we individually age every pregnancy, to give each cow's expected calving date. The cows can then be grouped in any number of different ways to facilitate drying off decisions, wintering options, and management of springer mobs.

If you haven't done so already, please speak to a vet soon, to discuss what information you would like from your pregnancy test, and when is the best time to test the herd to get that information. February is already beginning to fill up!

Lepto time!

Leptospirosis vaccination season is upon us again and Clutha Vets are again strongly advising that calves be vaccinated early to reduce the 'window of opportunity' for them to become infected with leptospirosis.

Best practice encourages vaccination of all calves with 2 injections of a Leptospirosis vaccine 4 to 6 weeks apart, from **12 weeks** of age. Vaccination

can be combined with a '5 in 1' Clostridial vaccine (making it '7 in 1'), to provide additional protection against pulpy kidney, blackleg, tetanus, Black's disease and malignant oedema. If you routinely vaccinate early with 5 in 1 you might consider vaccination with 7 in 1 at that time instead. Calves may require a third shot to 'bring into line' with the vaccination time of the main herd, depending on when it is usually done.

Our technicians will be in contact with you early in the new year to arrange vaccination of your calves at a time that suits you.

It is your responsibility as an employer to minimise the risk of your staff (and visitors to the farm, including us!) contracting leptospirosis. Early vaccination is part of achieving this.

As a reminder, all heifers (rising 2's) and cows (including carry-overs) should receive a single yearly booster at the same time as the herd. Any bulls, bought in stock, or beef animals in contact with dairy stock should also be vaccinated (this includes beef calves running with dairy calves). Any stock not previously vaccinated or of unknown status, should receive 2 shots, 4 to 6 weeks apart. However, if these animals are already infected, they will continue to shed leptospores for several months. We would advise you to purchase stock which are already on a Leptospirosis vaccination programme.

If you are part of Leptosure, it is time to make sure all of the steps (as well as vaccination) that you were required to put in place as part of the Leptospirosis control programme for your farm have been done. And for most of you, it is rolling around to the anniversary date for your annual Leptosure consultation. It is a good idea to do this on farm, with as many farm staff as possible present, to turn it into a learning opportunity, and cover your obligations to identify this workplace hazard to your staff.

Hot cows

On hot days, milking cows can drink 70-100 litres of water each, and this needs to be supplied over about 5 hours, i.e. the minimum flow to the trough must be 14 litres/cow/hr. For a 300 cow mob this is 4200 l/hr or 70 l/min. Is your water supply to every paddock up to it?

To check:

- 1) Do the calculation above for your herd, to get litres required per minute.
- 2) Mark the trough water level.

3) Hold the ballcock up, and using a bucket, empty out the amount required in a minute.

4) Hold the ballcock right down for one minute, and see if the trough refills to the original mark.

Also consider cow access to the trough. A trough under a fence available drinking area reduced by more than half, and heifers may well miss out if older cows are pushing them out of the way. A large trough on the exit race will give every cow access to plenty of water twice a day.

You might also like to consider keeping cows cool by milking a bit later in the afternoon (more comfortable for you as well) and putting up a simple garden sprinkler over the yard (makes hosing down easier after milking too!).

Cows doing the splits

At this time of year we always see a few cases, associated with slippery races and bulling behaviour. A lot of them fail to recover due to lack of aftercare, rather than the severity of the initial injury. The important thing is to carry the cow (in a sling, or held down on her side on a suitable board, not using hip-clamps!) to somewhere with a firm footing (i.e. paddock) as soon as possible, so she does not do further damage by trying to get up. The back legs should be hobbled together, about 35cm apart. Welfare-approved hobbles, with Velcro straps, are available from Retail for about \$55, and are an essential piece of equipment on the dairy farm. A vet should then see the cow as soon as possible, to assess the damage and give a prognosis. These injuries can take several weeks to heal, and it may be necessary to dry off the cow, rather than risk further damage by bringing her into the shed.

Brief reminders

Drug storage – With the onset of the warm weather, remember that antibiotics don't like to be cooked! The dairy regulations suggest that all cow sheds should have a lockable cupboard for restricted drugs. From now on it is really important to use the cupboard, to protect the drugs from heat (and in some cases light). One reason you may encounter treatment failure is that the antibiotics have been inactivated by being left in a place where they are exposed to heat.

Excede LA – Is a new formulation of the antibiotic used in Excenel, suitable for treating the same sorts of disease (at this time of year, mostly those lame cows that require antibiotic). The difference

is, it now provides up to 6 days of effective levels of Ceftiofur from a single, small-volume injection. It has nil milk withhold (great now that there is not much milk being taken for calves, and "sickie" mobs are gone). If you are an Excenel user, or the convenience of a single shot and no milk w/h appeals over the holidays, speak to a vet about giving Excede a trial. The meat withholding is 56 days.

New product "Udder Comfort": Is a blend of oils (olive, cornmint, menthol and tea tree) that are reputed to have mild anti inflammatory properties that claim to soften and soothe tender udders and hard quarters. This should aid milkout of those quarters and may be useful in acute clinical mastitis with inflamed quarters to achieve the same result. Relieving pre- and post-calving udder swelling not related to mastitis would be another use. There are testimonials from farmers claiming reduction in BMSCC without the use of antibiotics, however these are not controlled trials that look at treated and untreated, or take into account other important management changes that dramatically decrease cell counts. The product I see could be a useful aid in treating the inflammation caused by mastitis, not the mastitis itself. It is a case of where best to spend your money and effort effectively. See retail for more details

Condition scoring the herd: We plan to conduct a widespread survey of the BCS of dairy herds in the region over the coming weeks. The aim is to emphasise the importance of body condition score (and scoring) in improving the herd's reproductive performance. A few farmers from each area will be offered the opportunity to have a sample of their herd body condition scored by Clutha Vets for a nominal fee. Farmers will be contacted by one of our team in the coming weeks to see if they would like to participate in this survey.

Pet food collection: The Clutha Leader has recently been carrying an ad for an injured stock collection service (for pet food). This seems like a good option for some cattle at this time of year. However, the injured cow's welfare must be paramount. If she needs to be destroyed immediately for humane reasons, please don't keep her hanging around a few days until the pet food truck can get there. Forde's Pet Food Service number is 03 236 1199.

Retail News

Hamish and Doreen Anderson were the lucky winners of the "Ultimate Outdoor Entertainment

Package" consisting of stainless steel 6 burner BBQ, table, chair & umbrella set, portable bar fridge, gas heater & more, courtesy of Merial-Ancare.

"Take-a-mate Fishing" has also been drawn. Kevin and Helen Chalmers have won places amongst the sheep farmers on the trip to Stewart Island in 2010. No doubt they will be fielding plenty of queries about the why's and how's of converting to dairying!

We are all looking forward to a long summer of barbeque-seared blue cod, Kowhai Bush gourmet new potatoes, with a side salad of baby swede greens and a Mainland Vintage Blue dressing, down at Stirling.

Joke

A ventriloquist was driving through the Catlins on "summer" holiday when his car broke down. He walked to the nearest farm to use the phone. The farmer seemed to be the stereotypical rural type, so the ventriloquist thought he would have some fun with him. The farmer began to lead him back to the house.

Along the way, they passed a horse. The ventriloquist said to the farmer, "Is this your horse?" The farmer replied, "Yep." The ventriloquist asked, "Can he talk?" The farmer said, "Nope." The ventriloquist then said to the horse, "So, how do you like it here?" He then threw his voice, and said in a horse-like voice, "Oh, it's pretty good. Every morning the farmer feeds me oats." Upon hearing this the farmer was startled and quickened his pace.

Soon they came to a cow. The ventriloquist asked, "Is this your cow?" and the farmer replied, "Yep." He then asked, "Does she talk?" and the farmer replied, "I..I don't think so." The ventriloquist asked the cow, "How do you like it here?" and threw his voice again. In a cow-like voice, he said, "Oh, I like it just fine. Twice a day the farmer comes and milks me." Upon hearing this, the farmer squirmed. He looked down at the ground and continued walking.

Soon they came to some sheep. The ventriloquist asked, "Are these your sheep?" and the farmer replied, "Yep." He then asked, "Do they talk?" and the farmer exclaimed, "Yes, but they lie!"