

CUD

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



May 2022

Clinic News

As the season draws to its close, our focus has moved to helping everyone get well set up for a smooth dry-off. As with all other goods in NZ at the moment our supply chains are under pressure, so we chose early to limit the number of DCT lines we had on offer, lock in the price, and make sure we had all the stock required on hand for when you need it. This seems to have paid off, and most farmers have now completed their autumn consult, and have their DCT on farm. Thank you!

The team are well underway with Teatsealing the heifers, but will take a short break from that to help with Teatseal and dry cow therapy administration for cows through May. It is good to welcome back Marc McElrea for another season, and this year we also welcome Nicole Kennedy and Sam(antha) Storer to the tech team in Balclutha and Milton respectively. You'll also meet our newest vet Darius, who has been released from isolation (induction) in small animals and is now out and about on farm work. And just when you thought it was safe to come back into the Balclutha store, the old retail crew of Wilma, Jane and Smarty are back, in various combinations, to cover some well-earned breaks for the retail team.

One thing that we are required to do a little differently this year is make sure each client using Teatseal (in heifers or cows; administered by you & your staff or us) acknowledges the risks associated with this product. Teatseal is a great tool to manage milk quality while reducing antibiotic usage, and if you are using it, we will be asking you to sign off a waiver that you accept the liability for the associated risk. In return, we are required to make sure that you and your team are right up to speed with best practice use of Teatseal, to minimise the risk. We are more than happy to provide staff training and / or supervision to make sure your team follow “best practice” procedures this dry cow season.

Drying off cows early

The rain that finally arrived in April has been too little, too late for many, but the icing on the cake in some of the wetter parts of the practice. Because of the dry, nearly every one is underway with the process of getting at least some cows dried off. Of course the difficulty in getting space at the works, the normal option of sending culls away early, has not been much reduced.

Instead, some people have been able to find grazing off farm for culls until space becomes available, although in one case the grazier taking the cows insisted on them receiving DCT to protect himself from a mastitis break down. Other farmers have turned the situation on it's head, and are planning to milk culls (and particularly empties, who are still doing reasonable production) into late May and even June. This allows for early dry off of in-calf cows, so that they have maximum time to gain body condition before calving. Yet others have been able to source affordable supplement—the number of trucks loaded with feed heading south past the Balclutha clinic is quite remarkable.

I think we need to accept that these difficult seasons are going to become much more common, and the lesson is that what we feed the cows is going to have to change to cope. At the risk of re-using the clichés, our systems are going to have to be more flexible, more resilient and have more options for when things don't go the way we expect in the seasons ahead.

Turning off the tap

Drying cows off involves much more than shoving some antibiotic tubes up their teats on the day the May snow storm arrives! While it is best to abruptly cease milking cows that are producing less than 12 litres per day and that have been adequately prepared; cows producing more than 12 litres cannot be expected to drop from that level of production to nothing overnight. You need to make a plan *now* to turn off the milk tap on your higher producing cows, to ensure successful dry off.

Stemming the flow of milk relies on turning down, but not off, the dietary protein supply; and this must be done while maintaining sufficient energy intake for body condition gain, and sufficient fibre for rumen health. Between now and three days before dry off day, in several steps, you need to lower dietary protein to about 12%. To do this, you need to limit pasture intake and remove all protein concentrates (PKE, DDG etc) and energy concentrates (grain) by 7 days before dry off. Gradual steps are the best way to do this. These changes will leave the cows feeling hungry, but you can compensate with a low protein silage, like whole crop. Calcium supplements (but not magnesium) should also be removed now.

Once you get within three days of dry off, energy can be reduced to about 90MJ ME/cow/day—no quality pasture intake, but plenty of poor quality silage and free choice hay or straw to keep the rumen full of fibre.

What are the collars telling us?

One of the helpful reports that the data from cow collars (and similar technologies) can generate at this stage of the season is “suspect abortions” ie animals that have been pregnancy tested in calf earlier, but now look to have resumed cycling activity. Like Covid tests (and all others) this test has both a “sensitivity” (how good is it at picking up *all* of the cows that have slipped?) and a “specificity” (does it include any cows that have *not* slipped?). We are often called to check the “suspect abortion” cows and usually find some that have and some that have not slipped.

In other words, at this stage, it seems it is worth checking those cows, to avoid inadvertently culling in-calf cows (specificity). It remains to be seen whether the technology is getting all of the slips (sensitivity) - that will be revealed at calving time. If sensitivity is high (the collars find them all) it could do away with the need for the end of season whole herd pregnancy test that many farmers currently do.

Things to do in May

- Trace element testing on herd, heifers and calves pre-winter
- End of season scan, to avoid wintering empty cows
- Calculate dry-off date, and start planning feeding around that
- Get everything you need ready for dry off day (gloves, meths, cotton balls, paint, tubes, teatspray)
- Get early-calving light-condition animals dried off now (cows under BCS 4, R3's under 4.5)
- Johne's disease testing in final herd milk test, with blood test to confirm
- Strategic worm drench for light cows
- Salmonella vaccination
- Plan transition to winter crop—measure and calculate—don't guess!
- Book in for the Clutha Vets Golf Tournament—you don't need to be a pro! - 9 June

Merchandise promotions:

- **Alleva Cattle:**

Boss Pour On: Get a Rugged Oilskin Vest on Boss 5lt or a warm Zip Top on Boss 2.5lt
Turbo 7.5lt Pour On: VERY LIMITED Stock—Get a Pole Saw with Turbo 7.5ltr Promo Pack.

- **Boehringer Ingelheim Cattle:**

DeWalt Tools On selected BI Pour On, Injection and Oral.

DeWalt 18V Cordless Drill Sets: Eprinex 25lt, Eclipse 12.5lt, Eclipse B12 Inj 6lt

DeWalt Deepbox Toolbox: Eclipse 5lt, Matrix C 20lt

DeWalt 35pc Screwdriver Kits: Eclipse 2.5lt, Eclipse Inj and more...

Promo Eclipse 5.5lt Pour On: **Best Buy**—All Drench No Promo

- **Topline Pour On:** Always great buying.